



Temples and Legends of Uttar Pradesh

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TEMPLES AND LEGENDS OF
HIMACHAL PRADESH



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By

P. C. ROY CHAUDHURY



1981

BHARATIYA VIDYA BHAVAN

KULAPATI MUNSHI MARG,

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INTRODUCTION

Temples and Legends of Himachal Pradesh is the fourth of my humble contribution in the series, sponsored by Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan, the three earlier books being on the same subject for Bihar, Bengal and Nepal. The Bhavan has done me the honour by asking me to write the two books on Haryana and Punjab as well.

I feel nostalgic, a disease probably with persons who have crossed seventy-five years and I feel I must recall how I came to be associated with the Bhavan, one of the foremost and prestigious cultural institutions of India. It was in 1956 that I had the privilege of coming to know that scholar and statesman Sri Sri Prakasa, the Governor of Madras, who was closely associated with the Bhavan. I was at that time writing a book on Jainism in Bihar and knowing that Sri Sri Prakasa was intimately associated with Bihar I requested him to write the Foreword for the book. He agreed and after going through the manuscript gave me some suggestions and wrote a fine piece of intellectual appreciation of the subject as the Foreword. Incidentally about a decade later, Mahamuni Sri Vidyanandji of the Swetambara Jain Mahamandal gave me an award at a public meeting at Meerut for that contribution when Sri Sri Prakasa was no more with us.

It was Sri Sri Prakasaji who had suggested that I should join the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan in some capacity after I retired from Government service. He had introduced me to Sri Ramakrishnan. Sri Sri Prakasaji had suggested that I could take up the subject of the unbeatable shrines and the legends associated with them in the different provinces or interpret the folklore of the different regions as my subject. My fifteen years in Bihar as the State Editor of the District

Gazetteers at the fag end of my service had developed a deep love for such subjects. I am grateful to the Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan for giving me an opportunity for researching into the temples and their legends in a general way and try to arouse more interest in them in my readers.

I have attempted to give a book of general interest to the reader who has, more or less, a fleeting interest in the subject and would like to visit some of them some time. But at the same time I have tried to give some indications where a further study could be made by the reader who has more than a fleeting interest. For example, in this small book, besides describing the more important old temples of Himachal Pradesh and their legends I have indicated that there are people speaking a Mundari dialect in Lahoul and Spiti while Mundari is the language of the Mundas living in Chotanagpur in Bihar, parts of Bengal and Madhya Pradesh. A linguist may find some interest and carry on further study as to when the Mundari speaking people lived in this far-flung Himachal district thousands of miles away from the present Mundari speaking tribe and how the language has changed in the course of centuries. Kinnaur, Lahoul and Spiti and the area of Kulu districts should be the anthropologists' delight from various points of view. Buddhism and Hinduism have coalesced with Animism, polyandry flourishes and the physical features completely regulate the daily life of the people. The fauna and the flora and the superb natural environs in which the temples are located and the legends have grown have not received the necessary attention of the people of the rest of India. Peculiarly enough, while the wall paintings of the temples of the area and particularly Kangra district had attracted attention earlier the temples were not very well known. The evolution of the different types of temples in this region could well be studied with that of the other areas in the North and the South. There has hardly been any in-depth study of the aboriginal art or the folk music and dances in this region.

I have drawn heavily on some of the older travelogues, monographs, gazetteers and research pieces. My thanks are due to their authors. Mention has been made at the proper places of those authors. Mr. M. D. Momgain, Mr. M. S. Mukherji, I.A.S. and Mr. K. L. Vaidya have been kind to me by giving valuable ideas. My young friend, Mr. Binoy Mitra, a free-lance artist of Chandigarh, has given the line picture for the book cover. My friends in the Bhavan have taken great care for the production of the book. I am grateful to all of them.

I shall be happy if I have been able to catch the glory that the Himachal Pradesh temples are along with their immortal legends in the following pages even to a small extent. I have enjoyed doing the book for the Bhavan and strengthening my ties with the great institution once again.

Chandigarh
9-9-1981

P. C. Roy Chaudhury

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THE BACKGROUND OF THE TEMPLES IN HIMACHAL PRADESH

It is often said and not far from wrong that in the Himalayan region there are as many gods as there are villages and probably more. Every village whether it consists of twenty hamlets or a few hundreds of them has a village *deota* or *godling* and probably also a *kul-deota* of the family of the principal man in the village. Then there may be a dangerous corner of the meandering hilly foot-path nearby where there may be a mound of stones and some flags or pieces of cloth tied to some of them or to a nearby tree. This is considered to be the abode of the spirit of the hill-side who has to be appeased if a slip is to be avoided and every passer-by is expected to throw a stone on the mound. If there be some large trees of particular species they may also be the home of the *bana-devata* or the forest-deity. Also if there is a piece of unhewn wood stuck near patches of cultivation it may be the symbol showing the spirit of the soil who has been worshipped.

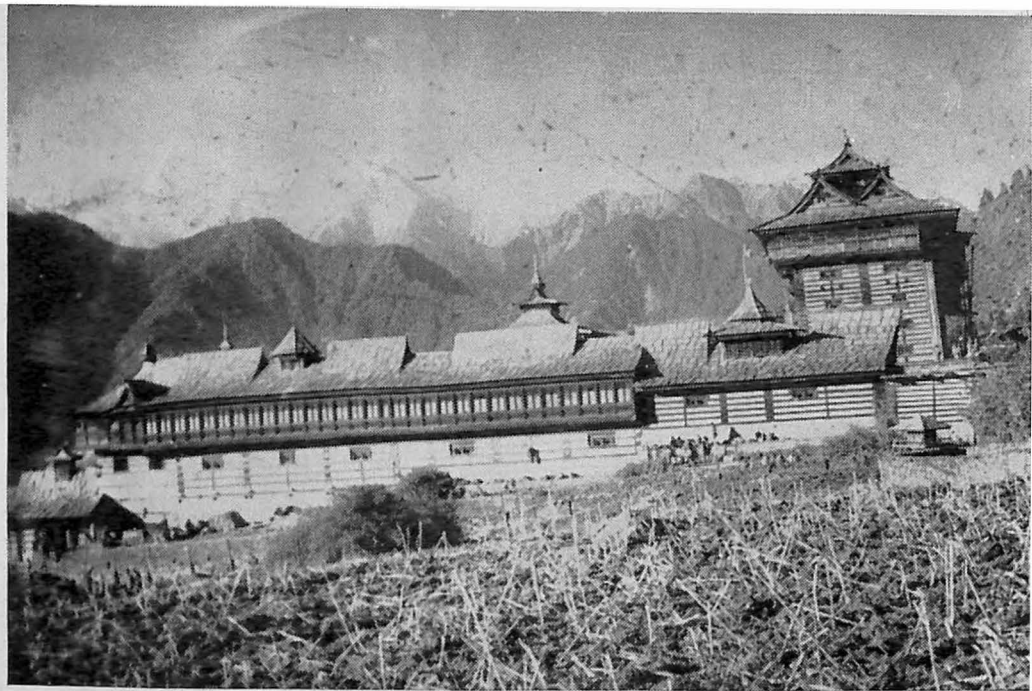
These are all benign deities of the second order. Deep faith in them and their worship are not enough to have complete freedom from a lingering fear of the many malevolent spirits of the hills, forests, springs or lakes that may be lurking about and have to be kept satisfied. So we find the life of the average Himachali deeply imbued with faith and worship. But the village god or *sidha* is held to be inferior in status to the three other deities higher in status, namely, Durga or Devi, Siva and Vishnu in their different manifestations. Hindu mythology supplies the background of the various manifestations and the legends are the source of great inspiration and faith. The idols are made and brought and very often we are told that the icons were accidentally found or revealed themselves in dream or were *swayambhus* and came out themselves. Some of the deities have their own priests and their services have to be engaged for offering

worship. It is also peculiar in Himachal that for some of the temples the worshipper has to take his own priests. Also the priestly class does not necessarily come from the Brahmin caste.

Just as the erstwhile rulers of the Himachal States, big or small, felt and gave out they were trustees for the presiding deity of the ruling family, the villagers also feel and give out they are the *raiya*s (subjects) of particular *devatas* of the village. Almost every village has got one or two or even more proprietary *devatas*. In any widespread distress, personal illness or cattle epidemic the *devatas* are fervently worshipped. Water is necessary for agriculture in the mountains, droughts have to be avoided, snakes have to be guarded against. The Naga Cult enjoining snake-worship is widely prevalent. Narayan and Pashakot are *devatas* and Phungni *devi* of Chohar Valley in Mandi district are worshipped for preventing drought. Men and women have passed on some of their reflexes to their Gods and Goddesses. No one should smoke near Narayan and Pashakot but the Baba Kot deity in the old palace of Mandi is taken to be very fond of tobacco and a *hukka* or smoking hubble-bubble is always kept by his side. In the temples in the frozen climate naturally the deities have to be appeased by *Chhang* or home-brewn intoxicating beverage. When the worshippers cannot possibly live without *Chhang* how could their Gods? Baba Bhutnath of Mandi assures rain and as a result he is taken to love water and the *linga* emblem of Baba Bhutnath is constantly bathed which has become a community affair and is known as *gadua*. It is firmly held that *gadua* alone could assure rain.

From our study and travels we have concluded that the faith of the people is firstly in Durga or *Devi* and then Siva and then Vishnu or Krishna. It is peculiar that though of the Hindu trinity Brahma is the creator, Vishnu the preserver and Siva is the destroyer, Brahma is hardly worshipped in a temple. The temple of Brahma in Ajmer (Rajasthan) is the best known Brahma temple in Northern India.** Brahma

** Brahm or Brahma Deity, an Indian God is much more worshipped in Buddhist Thailand than in Hindu India. Worship of *Erawan* or *Airavata* the elephant *bahan* (carrier) of Brahma in Thailand is also common.



Bhim Kali Temple — Simla (Courtesy: H. P. Govt.).



is, more or less, put on the shelf for worshipping purposes. Brahma is probably succeeded by Durga, the divine consort of Siva and the daughter of Himavata (Himachal) as the Creative Power and is very popular in Himachal. The *Devi* has a number of popular forms. Siva the Destroyer and the husband of Durga is worshipped throughout Himachal by the worship of *Lingam* or in some other of his manifestations. He lives in Kailash within Himachal. He is the five-headed deity for *shristi* (creation), *palan* (preservation and protection), *samhar* (destruction), *nigraha* (punishing the wrong), and *anugraha* (*Karuna* or mercy and compassion). He is also the *Yogi* the author of *Tandava Nritya* to avenge the death of his divine wife at the insult meted out to him by his father-in-law Daksha. The *Dhatura* (Cannabis) - loving *Bholanath*, the *Gangadhar* (the god who held the river Ganga in his matted hair), the *Ardhanariswar* (the deity who is half male and half female), the *Vaidyanath* (the physicians' deity), *pashupatinath* (the lord of the animals), and the *Umapati* (the husband of the gentle Uma who goes down to the Earth to her father's place for 4 days in the year when the *Durga Puja* is celebrated) are the other forms. Lord Siva is worshipped at different places in Himachal Pradesh in his different aspects. This finds a more intensive echo in Durga worship as well. Mother Durga is the *Mahishamardini* (the slayer of the buffalo-demon), the *Bhuvaneswari* the crowned presiding deity of the Universe indulging in charity and assurances. She is the *Adya Shakti* the primeval energy that creates and in her worship we see the symbolical victory of Virtue over Sin. Every Himachali home and every Himachali man or woman has a soft corner for the *Devi*, — the daughter of the Himalayan range. She is, they feel, absolutely their own, — daughter or mother-head of the mankind. She has also many different names and her icons differ. She is Uma, Durga, Parvati, Kali, Mahakali, Tripura-Sundri, Chamunda and Lakshmi. The story of the defeat of Sin by Virtue by *Mahishasur-badh* or the destruction of the Mahishasura demon by the *Devi* or Durga is the theme of *Durga Puja* celebrated over a week, throughout Himachal Pradesh.

Krishna Cult has also a deep impact. Krishna has been idolised in his various manifestations, as a boy playing pranks on his mother, as a young romantic youth with his love dalliances with Radha and the *Gopinis* and as Krishna revealing to Arjuna the Bhagavad Geeta. The Wall-paintings on some of the walls of the temples have the *Krishna-Radha* theme as the principal subject for painting. The *Muralidhar* (flute-playing) Krishna is a common icon.

Districts bordering Tibet have Lamaism as the ruling religion but as we have discussed there is a happy co-existence between Lamaism and Hinduism in these regions. The same man is a Buddhist and a Hindu. He could even become a Lama or Monk and later change into his civil life and worship Hindu deities. Lamaism has two prominent branches, known after the colour of their hats,—red and yellow. There is also another sect—the *Kar-gyu-pa*, i.e. the white sect.

The Red Hats (*Ning-ma-pa*) follow the older order while the Yellow Hats (*Ge-lug-pa*) follow the reformed school founded by Tsong-kha-pa (1357-1419). The founder was taken as an incarnation of Manjushri and had set up the Gen-den monastery, a few miles east of Lhasa. The Dalai Lama took charge of this religious order. The yellow order has taboos on marriage, drinking and meat-eating.

The Buddhist pantheon of deities is as flexible and large as those of the Hindu pantheon. They have got various Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Goddesses and as well later Buddhas and Bodhisattvas. Besides the Buddhist mythological divinities there are Buddhist saints, like Padmasambhava, Atisa etc., who also were raised into objects of worship by the Buddhists. The usual prayer that constantly rings out is *OM MANI PADME HUM* with different interpretations.** The Buddhist temples housing icons of Buddhas and Bodhisattvas and other Buddhist objects of veneration, location of Buddhas without any temples, Buddhist monasteries and nunneries

** "Om is difficult to translate, but it may be understood to mean the initiation of worship. *Mani* stands for jewel and *padme* means 'in the lotus'. *Hum* implies defiance of one's own self."

The Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas by K. L. Vaidya (p. 28).

housing monks, nuns and scriptures, Buddhist deities and enforcing Buddhist norms of discipline, chortens, *thankas* and other religious flags are there to satisfy the religiosity of the Buddhists. There is complete freedom to follow Buddhist auspicious days with festivities.

K. L. Vaidya observes :

“The monasteries in the Himalayas are great repository of the lamaistic religion and culture. Whether the monastery is flat-roofed as is found in the snow-bound regions, or pagoda like tier-roofed as in the lower altitudes, it has some common characteristics. Unlike most of the Hindu temples, the Buddhist *gompas* are seldom dedicated to one god or goddess, rather they have the entire pantheon. Some of the gods find place on the altar in the form of metal and stucco images and others on walls and hangings. All the deities and divinities are placed in their own order of importance. The walls and hangings carry pictures of the legends connected with the various deities and divinities. In fact a good monastery carries picturisation of the entire Buddhist cosmology and pantheon executed in fresh sober colours with a remarkable artistic sense. Unlike the Hindu temples the monastery has an image chamber and the prayer-hall combined into one. The monks sit cross-legged on the red *divan* in the nave between the wooden pillars supporting the roof. Hangings, painted banners and pennants are added to decorate the hall and create an appropriate atmosphere for prayer and worship.”**

We cannot forget the fringe population who are still animistic and have a store of superstitions to fill up their life. As a matter of fact their beliefs have been largely incorporated in the life and religious beliefs of the more sophisticated Hindus and Buddhists. The Naga Cult, and Gugga worship, are common to the Hindus. The fringe population has more or less, animistic beliefs. The Siva cult encourages the Naga worship. Lord Siva has always garlands of snakes. Vaidya observes that “Nagas are but the later manifestation of Siva and similarly the *Devis* are that of Kali.” Without

** *The Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas* by K. L. Vaidya (National : New Delhi, 1977), p. 29.

fully concurring with Vaidya about Nagas as we do not know of any authority or argument for this conclusion we agree as to the great hold of the Serpent-worship in this region. Kamarn Naga, an ancient deity has a stone idol at Nachan and a shrine in Sanor Valley in Mandi district. Mahuna Naga is worshipped widely in Simla and Sirmur districts. Very often an earthen replica of a serpent is taken to represent the serpent deity. In epidemics and in the season when snake-bites are common, serpent worship has a premium. There are a large number of Naga temples particularly in Kulu district. The following is the legend about Kelang Naga in Chamba district :

“In Bhramaur of Chamba district, which is famous for its ancient images and shrines, there is a temple of Kelang Naga near the village Kugti. The legend has it that once when an epidemic broke out, it was this deity who came to the rescue of the people. The deity was then residing in British Lahaul of pre-independence days. The people invoked him in their hour of distress. The deity responded favourably and came riding on the horns of a ram. While coming from Lahaul he stopped at Dughi, some three kilometres from the present temple site. Later he moved to Darun which was a cold place and was not easily approachable. Here on digging a three-headed image, in padmasan posture, of stone was found and when it was removed a spring gushed forth. A temple was erected and Raja Ram Singh of Chamba installed there an *ashtadhatu* (an alloy of eight metals) image with figures of serpent all-round. Now the deity enjoys a good position. He is the lord of the Kugti Valley and its people, especially the Gaddis, offer him goats in sacrifice with a view to getting blessings and boons.”**

The masked and other forms of Lama dances, the Lama mystery plays, the folk-tales, the Hindu mythological legends, the pahari painting on the walls of the temples, the folk and

** *The Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas* by K. L. Vaidya, (National : New Delhi, 1977), p. 18.

ritualistic arts, the religious songs, the religious fairs and festivals (of which there are many in every district) have gone to feed the hunger for religion and worship of the Himachalis. The temples of Himachal Pradesh, large or small, have this deep sense of faith and worship as the background.

The temples of Himachal Pradesh have not grown out in isolation. It is apparent that at first the icons of the religious deities were left, more or less, in the open, with some kind of shelter. But the need for a permanent or a semi-permanent structure to give shelter to the deity and to the worshippers was felt and the temples grew out of this need. In a mountainous region just as well in a flat alluvial plain the physiography of the area comes in as a great factor as to what and how the structures will be built. That is why the low-lying hills or the valley areas have temples with a *shikhara*, domed and flat-roofed temples. The mid and higher hills have tiered roofs by way of a *pagoda* or a close replica to it. Very high mountain areas have more flat-roofed temples in a different style. *Shikharas* appear to be the gift of Gupta age and most of the *shikhara* temples in the North and in the South are made of bricks and dressed stones. There must be the availability of the right type of clay that could be made into bricks and stones that could be broken and processed. The areas were more in touch with the low-lying hill ridges and the impact was there and naturally the people built *shikhara* temples taking the model of the *shikhara* temples in the plains with some changes. These temples do not have much of wood in the main structure excepting the doors. The domed temple was the general style from the Gupta age right to the 19th century.

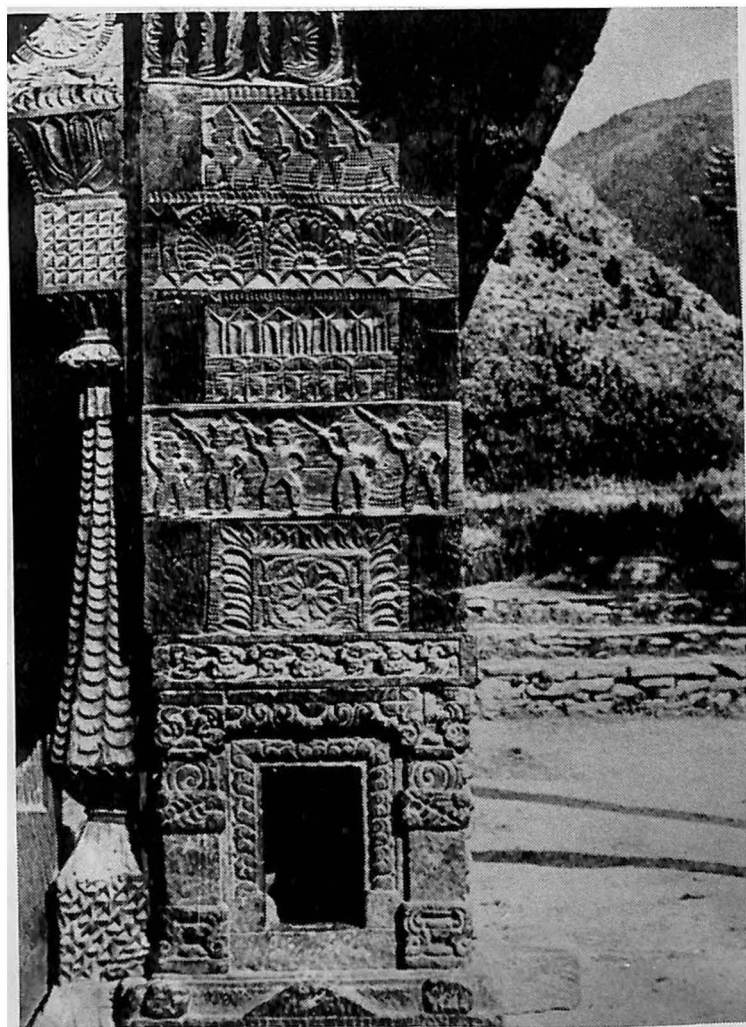
The flat-roofed temples are more found in the Kangra valley. The mid and higher hills give rise to temples with pent-roofs and with pyramidal tiers with roofs with alternate layers of wood and stone. Extensive use of strong timber was made in such temples and there was no dearth of particular species of timber that gave strong wood. But the high mountainous areas like Lahul-Spiti and Kinnaur built flat-roofed temples more after the Buddhist temples in Tibet.

The usual pattern of the Northern *shikhara* temples was followed. There was the shrine with the *shikhara* at the top, the *garbhagriha*, the *antarala* and the *mandapa* or the assembly-hall. The main deity along with the minor deities would be housed in the *garbhagriha*. The *mandapa* was meant for the assembly and usually there will be the circumambulatory passage for the worshippers to go round and the passage was known as *Pradakshinapath*. Big temples usually had this.

There can be no doubt that the *shikhara* in the shape of a finial (*kalasha*) or an *amalaka* (a circular ribbed stone disk) was the most attractive features from a distance. But the hill temples could not possibly have a massive *shikhara* that we find in Orissa or in the South. Earthquakes and landslides are not uncommon. Jagatsukh temple near Manali and the rock-cut temple complex of Masrur in Kangra are, probably, the earliest of such temples and belong to the early 8th century. The Visheshwar or Basheshwar Mahadev temple at Bajaura in the Kulu valley was built probably a century or two later and is a good example of the *shikhara* temple. The Mani Mahes temple at Bharmaur in Chamba district is another example. This was built by Raja Shahil Varman (920—40 A.D.). The other examples are the temple of Baijnath (13th century) and a number of later temples of this type in Mandi in the 16th century and later. In Kulu we find pyramidal carved temples and examples are those at Mangalor, Bajaura, Manikaran, Jagatsukh and Nagar. The Baijnath temple in Kangra resembles the Orissa temple. It is not unlikely that some of the Orissan architects might have been brought to construct this temple.

A recent example of a *shikhara* style temple is that at Udaipur near Chamba built after 1720. It is strange that this temple should have three marble idols, one of the deity Narayana and the other two of Raja Udai Singh and his brother Lachhman Singh (1720 A.D.). The Triloknath temple in Chamba is another important temple held sacred by both the Hindus and the Buddhists. This temple after the transfer of the areas is now in the district of Lahul and Spiti.

Mandi town has a number of stone temples in the *shikhara* style. Most of the temples have well carved figures and



Jagatsukh Sandhya Devi Temple: Upper Part — Stone Carving
Lower Part — Wood Carving.



Triloknath and Panchvaktra are quite exclusive in workmanship. This temple of Triloknath should not be mixed up with the one at Lahul and Spiti and was built near about 1820 A.D. There is a life-sized stone image of three-faced Siva with Parvati in his lap and mounted on a bull. The Panchvaktra temple is located at the confluence of the river Beas and its tributary Suketi. Lord Siva here has five faces and ten arms. Mandi probably has the only Ardha narishwar idol in a *shikhara* temple.

Most of the temples have wood carvings and some of them are excellent. Some of them have fine metal images and the brazen or stone Nandi bulls in the Siva temple are usually fine specimens.

"There are numerous pent-roofed structures, generally covered with slates or shingles in Himachal Pradesh. These shrines are dedicated to some god or goddess, gugga or pir. Some of the famous shrines, which may truly be called indigenous, include Bijli Mahadev (district Kulu), Shirgul (district Sirmur), Hatkoti Gijari (district Simla), Lakshna Devi, Shakti Devi and Kali Devi (in the district of Chamba at Bharmaur, Chhatrari and Mrikula respectively). The temples belonging to the Chamba district carry exquisite specimens of wood carvings besides the fine metal images therein."

Examples of pagoda type temples are : "Hidimba or Dungri (at Manali, district Kulu), Tripura Sundri (at Nagar, district Kulu), Bijli Mahadeva (district Kulu), Triyug Narayan (at Dayar opposite Bajaura, district Kulu), Ad-Brahma (at Khokan, district Kulu), Parashar and Chhatrari (district Mandi) and Sungara Maheshwara (at Sungra, district Kinnaur). There are also some such temples in Chamba."*

Examples of temples in domed structure are the Jwalamukhi and Chintpurni in district Kangra and Renuka in district Sirmur.

The flat-roofed temples include the temples of Narmadesvara (Sujanpur-Tira), Ram Gopal, (Damtal) and Brajraj

* *The Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas* by K. L. Vaidya.

Swami in Kangra valley. Some of the well-known Buddhist monasteries in Himachal are situated at the places below :

- Kinnaur* : Jangi, Kanam, Chini, Rangricho, Tashigong, Labrang, Sunam, Shiyalkar, Lipa and Thangi.
- Lahaul* : Kardang, Shashur, Bokar and Gurughantal.
- Spiti* : Kee, Dankhar, Tabo, Thangyur, Pin and Nako.

Rewalsar is the place where the Buddhists believe the spirit of Padma-sambhava rests. Thousands of Buddhist pilgrims from all over Lahul, Spiti, Kinnaur and Tibet come to pay their homage. "The gompa is an old Buddhist sanctuary similar to those found in Lahaul, Spiti and Kinnaur regions of Himachal Pradesh. The walls—outside and inside—are decorated with the frescoes executed in the traditional Tibetan style of painting. As for subjects, the outer wall carries Protectors of the Four Regions, two on each side of the entrance, and on the walls of the verandah appear the Wheel of Existence and a lama. The image of the Padma-sambhava is the central object of worship kept inside the shrine.

Apart from the famous gompa another draw of the place is a small circular lake with three quarters of a mile in diameter. The natural islands moving on the water surface is a veritable feast to the eyes.

Rewalsar is an old village where Hindu and Buddhist cultural influences can be marked. When the islands broke off from the mainland and started floating in the lake is a mystery to man, but both the Hindus and the Buddhists have woven two different tales around it.

Here, too, as is usually the case with water springs and reservoirs in the Himalayas, the lake is associated with Nag cult or serpent worship. The lake-water is believed to be flowing underground from Rewalsar to Nagchala, meaning serpent-path, a place ten kilometres from Mandi on the Manali-Simla National Highway. Nagchala is a small pool of

translucent water with a small shrine by its side. Apart from the tourist influx Rewalsar bustles with life at least on two occasions. One is Baisakhi in mid-April when thousands of people from the adjoining areas flock to this ancient village and the people have a ritual dip in the sacred water of the lake. The Hindus believe that it was here that the Rishi Lomas held his penance in devotion to Lord Siva. Overwhelmed, Siva gave the Rishi the seven floating islands in reward.

Another occasion is a Buddhist fair falling in Phalgun (February/March) when many people from the Buddhist Himalayas come on pilgrimage.

Rewalsar is equally important to the Sikhs who have a Gurudwara there. This Sikh shrine was built in commemoration of Guru Govind Singh's visit to that place.**

The sense of faith and religion, the impact of the mythological stories and the temples have given rise to the large number of religious fairs and festivals that are observed in Himachal Pradesh. While discussing the temples and legends of some of the districts in Himachal mention has been made of the religious fairs and festivals. A brief mention may be made here.

The fairs and festivals, religious in outlook, offer a good avenue for the sale and purchase of consumer goods, demonstration of cinema shows and a clearance of locally made articles like clothes, garments, pashmina shawls, leather and furs, hides and skins etc. The local musicians and orchestra parties get a chance to show their skill. Folk artistes and dancers stage folk dramas. Women-folk get a chance to come out in their fineries and do shopping. Every mela ground assumes a festive appearance.

The Dussehra festival of Kulu, the Ramlila demonstrations with crackers at many places, the Shivaratri festival at Mandi town, the week-long celebrations of the Minjar fair at Chamba, the Renuka festivities at Pachhad in Sirmur, the Sayar festivity at Bakloh (Kangra), Karsog (Mandi) and

** *The Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas* by K. L. Vaidya, (National, New Delhi, 1977) Page, 143-144.

Sabathu (Simla) on the 1st of *Asvin* month (September) where a buffalo bull is sacrificed symbolic of the destruction of the Mahishasur are some of the more famous religious festivals celebrated in large fairs.

The legend behind Renuka is as follows :

“The sage Jamadagni had his *ashram* (hermitage) somewhere near the lake where he was living along with his wife Renuka. The sage was murdered by one named Sahasrarjuna. Renuka was a very devoted wife. Struck by the incident, she jumped into the lake, thus putting an end to her life. The lake was named after Renuka, who assumed the status of a goddess after the great sacrifice. The event is celebrated every year from 10th to 12th day of the bright half of the *Kartika* (November) month at Renuka in tahsil Pachhad of district Sirmur. Another legend has it that the sage Jamadagni along with his wife, Renuka, lived on a hillock which is still called after him, *Jamu-ki-dhar*. Both of them were devotees of the Lord Vishnu whose penance they held for many years. Pleased at this, the Lord wanted to give them a boon. They expressed their desire for a son. They got many but the eldest was the Lord himself. He was Parshuram, sixth incarnation of the god Vishnu.

“Renuka used to fetch fresh water from the river Yamuna every day. One day on her return she came across a nude Gandharva couple. The amorous sight aroused passion in her and the earthen pot in which she was carrying water for her sage husband showed a crack. When Renuka related the incident to her husband, he got annoyed and held it as an act of sacrilege. The sage wanted to punish the wife. All the sons were called up and asked to behead the mother. They all refused but the eldest son, Parshuram, carried out the orders of his father by killing the mother and all the brothers.

“Jamadagni was pleased with Parshuram and he thought of granting him a boon. The only reward Parshuram could ask for was the revival of all the dead. The wish was granted and all came to life again.

Parshuram did not stay with his parents. Instead he wanted to go for penance somewhere in Badrinath. Before leaving, he promised to visit his parents once a year. Renuka fair is held to commemorate Parshuram's visit to his mother. On the 10th day of the bright half of the month *Kartika* (November) the idol of Parshuram, seated in a well decorated palanquin, is taken out in procession which treks the path of some eight kilometres from village Jamu to the site of the lake Renuka. The two deities held as embodiments of the Lord Parshuram, from villages Kattah and Masu, also join the procession which is attended by hill orchestra. A few folk dancers dressed in long garb with loose sleeves add to the gaiety of the procession as they dance to the accompaniment of the folk music. On the 11th day i.e. *Ekadashi*, the son stays with his mother and on the 12th afternoon he takes leave for Jamu with a promise to visit next year."*

The Minjar fair has different legends.

"The week-long festivities of the colourful Minjar fair of Chamba start on the second Sunday of *Shrawan* (August). When was Minjar first celebrated is not known but the present form of the fair is attributed to Raja Shahil Verma who ruled the State in the 10th century.

"As legend has it the Ravi had its course through the place now known as Chawgan. On one side of the river stands the shrine of Rani Champavati and on the other is the famous temple of Hari Rai. A sage was staying at the Champavati temple and every morning he would swim over the river and visit the Hari Rai temple. As he enjoyed the faith and respect of the Chamba folk, they thought of approaching the Raja to so arrange that the Hari Rai *darshan* is easily available to him as well as to the people. On the advice of the sage the Raja arranged a week-long *yajna* (religious sacrifice and oblation) and the Lord Varuna—the god of waters—was prayed for changing the river course. The Lord obliged and the river changed its course. Since then the event began to be celebrated on a mass scale.

* *The Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas* by K. L. Vaidya, (National, 1977), page 34-35.

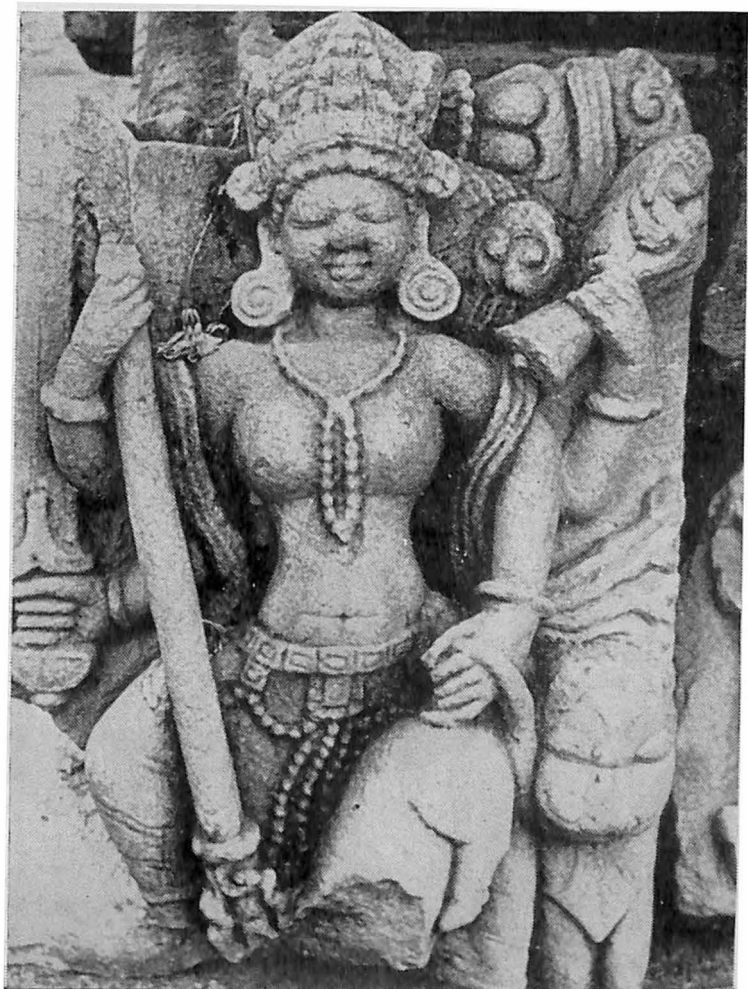
"The Minjar fair is also associated with an important event in the history of Chamba State. In his fight against a Kangra ruler, Raja Pratap Singh Verman of Chamba emerged victorious and while coming back from Bhatiat, he was given a rousing reception by his people who greeted him with the tentacles of maize and paddy plants.

"On the conclusion of the fair i.e. on third Sunday of the month *Shravan* (August), a procession, which is joined by thousands of local people and *mela* enthusiasts along with police bands and hill orchestra, starts from Akhand Chandi Palace and goes to the bank of the Ravi. A small platform is raised overlooking the river. A coconut, a rupee or a smaller coin, a fruit and a few paddy tentacles tied in a piece of *lohan*, a type of red cloth usually offered to the goddess, are usual offerings to the Ravi. Those, who cannot afford to make such offerings, do with paddy tentacles only. Folk songs are sung. The music is again played when the procession is on its way back to Chawgan."*

Religious songs form another source of religious inspiration to the people of Himachal Pradesh. Every religious festivity has its own religious songs eulogising the particular deity. Janmashtami, Shivaratri and Ramnavami bring forth full-throated hymns and songs in praise of Krishna, Siva and Rama. The famous Naina Devi and Jwalamukhi have their own religious hymns. The festival songs are preserved from mouth to mouth. In Nawala festival held in honour of Siva, the Gaddis offer long prayers in verse known as *Ainchalis*. It is a legend about the origin of the Universe explained in a simplistic manner.

Folk and ritual dances in Himachal also have got a strong religious flavour. The Kinnauris and the Gandharvas have been depicted as great singers and dancers in Pauranik legends. This tradition is still being retained. The music, songs, and dances of Kinnaur, Lahul and Spiti are all associated with religion. Even the folk arts in wood-carving, paintings, embroideries etc., have a religious background.

* *The Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas* by K. L. Vaidya, (p. 33-34).



Jagatsukh Temple of Gaurishankar — Mahishamardini Durga.



TEMPLES AND LEGENDS OF KULU-MANALI COMPLEX

In the last two decades Kulu-Manali complex has had a spurt of tourists annually and the natural beauty of the area amply deserves this. Roads have been well developed and well-appointed Rest houses have multiplied. Long distance tourist-planes, buses and taxis have brought the complex closer to the other areas. Dalai Lama and his Buddhist followers who came away from Tibet have been settled at Dharamshala and some other places in this area. Kulu is fairly well-connected by rail and road though more improvement is possible.

The ancient name of Kulu was Kulute. This was one of the oldest principalities in the Punjab hills. Kulute has a lot of references in old Sanskrit literature. A coin bearing the name of the early Rajas has been assigned on palaeographical grounds to the first or second Christian century. It was visited by the Chinese pilgrim Hiuen Tsang (A. D. 629-645). At that time Kulu probably included all the territory now in Mandi and Suket. The original capital was at Jagat-sukh but was moved to Nagar and finally to Sultanpur in A. D. 1660.

As observed by the historians the early historical records of the State are scanty and unreliable. The area being far in the interior of the mountains seems to have remained, more or less, independent till brought into subjection by Akbar along with the other hill States. It was frequently involved in war with the neighbouring States, especially Kashmir, Mandi and Kangra, and for a time the superficial area was as much as 10,000 square miles. On the decline of the Mughal power it came, in 1786, under the control of Raja Sansar Chand of Kangra, and in 1809 became tributary to the Sikhs. In 1841 it was annexed to the Sikh kingdom. After the First Sikh War, Kulu was included in the territory ceded to the British Government as part of the war indemnity.

Kulu does not have the rich historical, archaeological or epigraphical antiquities like Chamba.

In Kulu the most interesting remains of antiquity are the temples of Nirmand in Outer Saraj and Hat at Bajaura, with an ancient inscription at Salanu. Mandi and Suket also have ancient temples.

From the standpoint of antiquity the most interesting of all are two rock inscriptions. One is at Pathiar and the other at Kaniyara near Dharamshala. In each of these the legend in the inscription is in two scripts—called Brahmi and Kharoshthi, in use in the Punjab in early time. The former dates from about 300 B. C. and the latter 300 A. D.

The temples of this area have a distinction of their own though, by and large, they follow the average pattern of the temples of Himachal Pradesh excepting those in the Lahul and Spiti district which have a strong Buddhist context. The wood-temples and wood-cum-stone temples of Kulu-Manali complex had enjoyed gifts of free land endowments from the rulers and other affluent donors and could eke out a survival though they appear to have remained in backwaters till the British archaeologists appraised them. The architecture, sculpture, wood-carvings and in some cases paintings lend an attractive background to these temples which appear small in comparison to the massive temples of the South, Orissa or Bihar. Many temples are now abandoned or little known being in rather inaccessible areas.

The legends with which the temples, sacred sites, religious fairs, folk-stories, songs and arts of this region are associated are overwhelming and figure in many ancient texts.

The two important deities in the Hindu Pantheon regarded most important in Himachal Pradesh are Lord Siva and his consort Durga, or Parvati or Uma. Most of the temples in Kangra and Kulu are dedicated to them. We have emblems of Durga in her different aspects, — the sublime but serious-looking deity that has thrust her deadly weapon into the Mahishasur, the great demon in the shape of a fierce buffalo and striking him down typifying the victory of virtue

over sin and also the sublime, delicate and homely aspect of Uma, the ideal housewife devoted to the husband and the troubles of her children—the mankind. During Dussehra festival there is much religious fervour and colourful worship of Durga throughout Himachal. But essentially the worship of Durga in this area is somewhat different from the way of Durga worship in northern India.

The typical example is the famous Dussehra festival at Kulu which attracts thousands of visitors. Peculiarly enough the Kulu Dussehra is not centred on the worship of Durga although she is ultimately very much in the background. She is the goddess of victory and the Dussehra celebrates the victory of Rama over Ravana, the demon king,—the conquest of the evil. The Dussehra celebrations at Kulu are aimed at the homage paid to Rama or Raghunathji by the village *devtas*, far and near. About 150 to 200 of them are brought by the villagers to Kulu, some in their chariots or *palkis* and some carried by their devotees. There is an order in which they are brought to the Kulu Raj Palace. The first one is Hidimba Devi, the demon-goddess of the royal family. The idol is carried on a *rath* (chariot) twenty-four miles down the valley from the Dungri temple above Manali. The main devotee ("chela") in his religious frenzy shakes violently and the *rath* oscillates but does not turn over. Trumpets blow along with the raucous beating of the drums and a lamb will be thrown up into the air and caught by the devotees. The lamb is to be sacrificed at the end of the Dussehra. The Rai of Kulu ceremoniously pays homage and the deity is carried into a decorated room and set down. The deity of Tripura Sundri of Nagar comes from her three-tired quaint temple built of deodar wood. The temple is in the Pagoda style with three successions of superimposed roofs, each one a little smaller than the one below it. This is an uncommon type of temple in this area. She is taken as the mother-goddess. Then other *devis* and *devtas* arrive and the same ritual of paying homage is done. Raghunathji, the presiding deity of Kulu, is carried to one end of the maidan. It is a smaller bronze image only a few inches high. A special pony known

as Narsingh's horse parades. As soon as Raghunathji's deity is seated, the devotees of all the *devtas* start their bands. After *puja* sacrifice of a buffalo, a goat, a cock, a fish and a crab is offered. Durga remains absolutely off in the background as it is seen but the Dussehra means the demon killed and this is done by Durga by images separately throughout.

The temple of Bisheshar-Mahadev at Kulu is the largest stone monument there. According to Dr. Vogel in his Archaeological Survey of India, (1909-1910)—“This temple has excellent workmanship of the large bas-reliefs and, in fact, all the sculptural decoration on the Bajoura temple, points to an early date.” Though Vogel does not fix the probable period, later archaeologists think the temple at Bajoura dates from the late eighth or early ninth century. This temple is remarkable for its structure as well as the superb icons of deities. Bajoura temple has a large *shikhara* (a curvi-linear stone-tower) at the top with beautiful carvings above and decorated motifs below. There is no *mandapa* or the pillar hall which is a departure. The *Sanctum-Sanctoria* or the *garbhagriha* (sanctuary) contains the *lingam* (the Phallic emblem) of Lord Siva. The inside of the door jambs and the niches are decorated with beautiful carvings of female figures, Ganga and Jamuna. There is a standing figure of Vishnu and another of Ganesh. But the most splendid of all the figures is that of Durga, to the north of the temple. Durga wears a triple-pointed crown “edged with beading, characteristic of hill deities, and a large aureole, symbol of her sanctity, surrounds her head. With her eight arms she wields a variety of weapons, and yet she remains majestically aloof from the act of destruction she is performing.” There is a sublime repose on her face which has been very delicately and artistically brought out.

At a smaller village Dashed on the Nagar-Manali road, there is an ancient stone temple with a tower about thirty feet high. This also is taken to date from around the 9th century. Two images of female figures of delicate execution are there probably as *dvarapalas*. The temple is dedicated to Lord Siva and Parvati. There are quite a large number of such stone and wood temples many of which escape the



Bajaura Temple of Visesvara Mahadeva.

tourists. There is a small *shikhara* shrine in a village at Sajala near Dashal, which also has images of Siva and Parvati.

Jagatsukh village has a small *shikhara* temple about eight feet high re-excavated by Howell, an Assistant Commissioner, in the first decade of this century from the debris. This temple is dedicated to Gaurishankar, (the divine couple of Siva and Parvati). There is an icon of Durga killing the buffalo-demon with a triple crown, four arms and the *trishula* (trident) in one of her right hands striking down the buffalo-demon. The Devi holds the tail of the buffalo by her left hand. Unfortunately some portions of the icon are now broken but what remains is an unbeatable specimen for high sculpture. Here also the Devi's eyes are closed in a calm manner typifying the endless and timeless spirit in complete unison with universe and taking *virtue* and *vice* by a stride.

The Dungri temple above Manali is dedicated to goddess Hidimba where there are two small brass images of Durga which are taken out to join the Dussehra at Kulu. Somehow the deity Hidimba has been identified with Durga—one of the strange permutations in Hindu mythology.

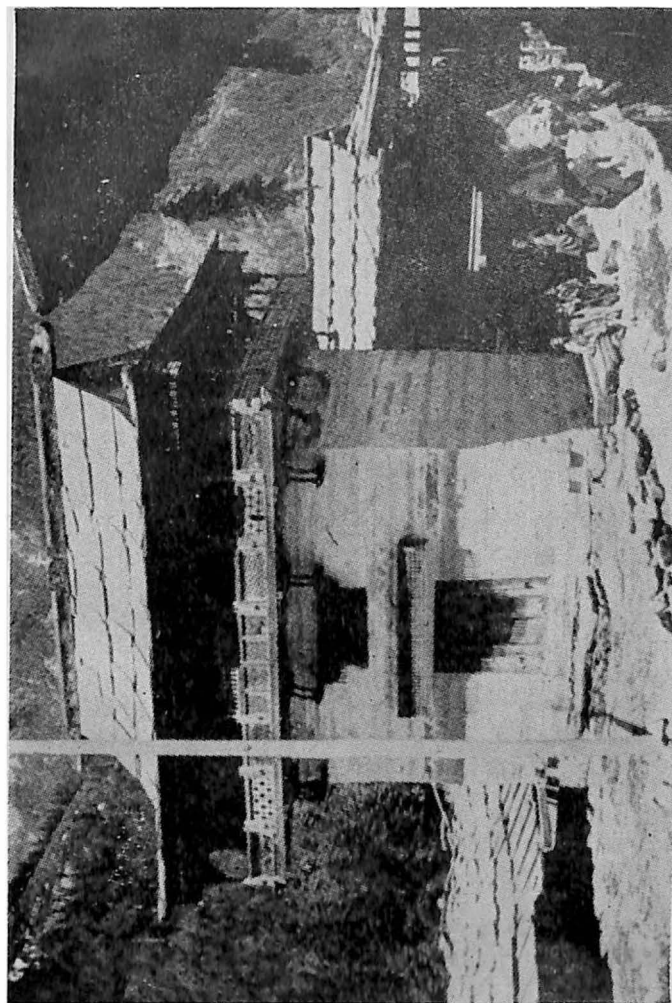
Though mother Durga is propitiated in a different manner in this area, there is a common element with the other provinces of Northern India. Dussehra or Durga Puja is a national festival, for the rich and the poor and for all the communities. There is no caste or social barrier among the devotees.

To the people of this complex so very rich in natural beauty Mother Durga comes in as the most popular deity very naturally. The Himalayas, the Dhauladhar and the Shivalik ranges have given superb landscapes of which Kulu-Manali complex has a very prominent place. There are religious and pilgrim centres, temples and holy water-sheets that bring thousands of devotees from far and wide. There was an acute need of well-appointed places of rest and the problem has attracted the attention of the Government and hotels, Rest Bungalows, Youth Hostels, Dharamshalas, Sarais, Holiday centres etc., are being set up. It is said that about 2000 temples, big or small, exist in Himachal Pradesh. The culture

is the product of a harmonious development and blending of the Siva, Shakti and Vaishnava cults and the temples in this complex are typical of that harmonious Pahadi culture. Kulu district is exquisite in the spring time (March) when the apricot trees offer fairy sprays of leafless bouquets and cherry and peach blossoms stand out like splashes of bright colour across the mountainscape. The simple people with an artistic bent of mind and religious poise rush to the temples of Raghunathji, Dhoongri temple of Devi Hidimba and others. Naturally the scenic beauty and sublimity of the mountains, valleys and lush greens suggest a benevolent *Adya-Shakti* or primeval energy and that craving of the mind is supplied by Durga, the divine consort of Lord Siva, the sombre God of *Tandava-Nritya*.

The classification of the different types of temples of Kulu-Manali complex does not pose great difficulty and it follows generally the pattern indicated earlier as to the temples in general in Himachal Pradesh. Accurate chronology as to when one temple type predominated or when the other type came up and whether the second type was meant to supplant the other will be a futile exercise in academic guesses. Even if another type came up it did never supplant the other type. The Hindu temples are not pulled down and at their worst are left in neglect. It is, however, well known that Jain temples are often pulled down for a reconstruction. In this Kulu-Manali complex as well as in the other areas of Himachal Pradesh it is quite usual to find neglected temples in the midst of forest or at the niches of mountains without any icons or deities. *Thairis* (open-air shrines) are also quite common. There could be no doubt that occasionally the images of deities are removed to other temples or, it may be that the deities were subjected to vandalism like surreptitious removal to another temple or theft. In a recent publication "*Kulu, the End of the Habitable World*", Penelope Chetwode* reiterated but gave an accurate presentation regarding the classification of the temples in this complex based on Col. A. F. P. Harcourt's observations who had been an Assistant Commissioner in Kulu from 1869 to 1871.

* *Kulu, The End of the Habitable World* by Penelope Chetwode, (John Murray, 1972).



Timber and Stone Residential Type Temple at Sarahan,



The first type comprises the carved stone temples with typical curvilinear tower known as *shikhara*. As mentioned earlier *shikharas* are quite common in most of the Hindu temples in Northern India. The famous temple of Vishveshvara Mahadeva at Bajaura in Kulu is the best example of this type of temple. The *shikhara* (stone tower) is always richly carved and crowned with the typical *amalaka* (imitating a segmented gourd). It has been conjectured that this classical style of temple so common in the Northern India plains was introduced in the hills of Himachal Pradesh near about seven or eight century A. D. A later ruler in the 17th century Raja Jagat Singh is credited with reintroducing the style into Kulu. Unfortunately by this time probably the excellent stone-carving style had deteriorated and Raja Jagat Singh's temples are not as richly decorated. The shrine of Gaurishankar at Nagar, which was the capital for some time, near the palace is another example of the *shikhara* style. Penelope Chetwode mentioned another example in the temple of Murlidhar (the flute-playing Krishna) at Thawa village. Raja Jagat Singh (1637-1672) was a Vishnu-worshipper and he brought the idol of Raghunathji from Oudh and raised a large *shikhara* temple in the East of Nagar castle. But it was a poor specimen in comparison to the *shikhara* temples of Vishveshvara Mahadeva of Bajaura or Gaurishankar at Nagar or Murlidhar at Thawa.

The second type of temple is the typical indigenous "timber-bonded style of the Western Himalaya" consisting of alternate courses of dry stone and deodar beams. This type is said to be more earthquake proof, — there is no mortar in-between the dressed stones and probably there will be a greater chance to quiver at the time of an earthquake and avoid a crash. There is usually a wooden verandah with pillars well carved and the pillars run right around the upper storey of the building. The temple in Outer Saraj is a good example. Here the roof is covered with enormous tiles and the roof ridge consists often of a single large trunk of a tree the two ends of which are carved into a monster's or an animal or a crocodile head. This style of a temple is also the pattern

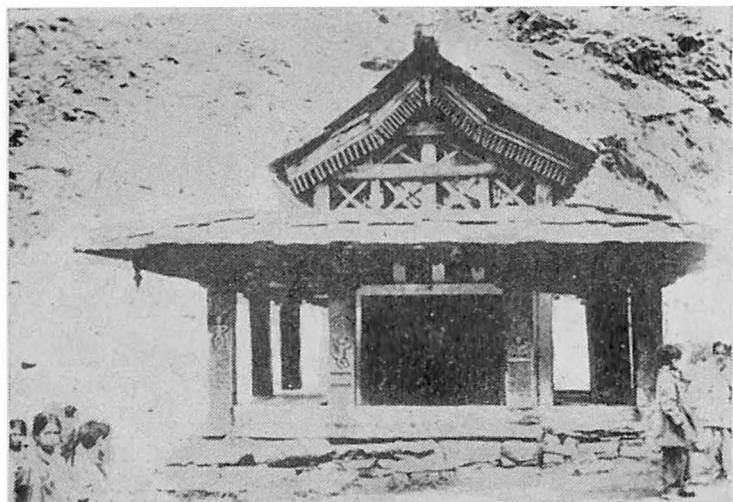
in many of the affluent residential buildings. There is hardly anything to distinguish between a secular building and a temple building.

The third type has been categorised as the Chalet type. Penelope Chetwode artistically but rather effectively wants one to black out mentally the tower of the second type temple, place the top storey on the ground and the Chalet style temple emerges. This type of temples are to be seen all over the Northern Himalaya and this is the type which is patronised now. The buildings rest on a broad wooden verandah with a roof supported by occasional carved pillars and the whole platform has railings and stands on wooden posts. The Durga temple outside Sarahan, below the Bashleo Pass in Outer Saraj is an example. There are several such temples including the one of Nar Singh at Nagar village.

The pagoda style temple is the fourth type and it really means a building with a succession of superimposed pent roof, each one a little smaller than the one below it. The bottom storey is usually of stone bonded by strong timber but the remainder of the building is mainly of wood. The caves are covered occasionally with tiles of stone. The temple of Tripura Sundri at Nagar is a typical example.

The pagoda style of temples is the rarest of the four types of the temples in this complex as mentioned. This is naturally so as the more obvious style to be adopted would be the Chalet-style which is a close imitation to the residential buildings.

The temples of any region originate from a number of factors. Firstly there should be a degree of affluence in individuals or possibly the existence of a rich ruling dynasty which make large temples possible. This has been the case in the South or Orissa. The Emperor Shah Jahan exhausted the treasury by building the Taj at Agra. Bengal, which seldom had a very strong and centralized ruling dynasty, never had either the very rich men to make rich temple endowments like those in the South. Another factor will naturally be the availability of materials to build temples with. In Bengal where stones are rare we get temples built of brick and mud,



Chalet type Temple at Gushaini with Folk-Art Carvings.

some with stone and mud and even we find wonderful specimens of artisanship in mud-temples. The temples in South, Orissa and Bihar are great examples of stone edifices. In Himachal Pradesh stone and wood are both available in plenty and naturally we get timber-bonded stone religious shrines. But these shrines were never as towering as the temples of Orissa or those in the South. The area is also prone to earthquakes, land-slides and occasionally torrential rains due to cloud burst. Any heavy stone and wood temple could be a danger. Naturally the people have taken to that temple type which is more familiar to them and that is the residential type of a building with necessary changes to suit the demands of a temple. We seldom get a steady daily flow of very large congregation of pilgrims in the temples of Himachal Pradesh as we get in the South or Orissa. So the *mandapa* or the space required for the congregation need not be very spacious. While sticking to the wooden residential houses with changes for the temples the Himachalis have followed the example in West Bengal. In that area the common type of temples are the residential hut with one, two or four curved thatched or semi-mortared roofs known as *ek-chala* (one roofed), *do-chala* (two-roofed), or *char-chalas* (four-roofed).*

There is another factor which has strongly influenced the temples in Himachal Pradesh. Unlike the other States or areas we have in Himachal Pradesh the frequent *devata* processions. It is very usual on various occasions to take out the deities of one, two or more temples together in procession accompanied by music and dance on a fixed route and through villages and the villagers do *pujas* to them. Preceded by standard-bearers, musicians including raucous drummers and musicians blowing curved bugles of enormous size like curved serpents, the *devatas* are taken out in wooden *palkis* (palanquins) slung on long poles resting on the shoulders of the carriers). There are scheduled metal masks fixed on the *palkis* or *raths* (chariots) in which *devatas* are taken out. There may also be wooden decorated *chhatris* (umbrellas) over the *devatas*. At particular points of the procession dances will be held and

* *Temples and Legends of Bengal* by P. C. Roy Chaudhury (Bharatiya Vidya Bhavan).

the *rath* tilted from one side to the other but taking particular care the icons do not fall down. At places the *devatas* would be set down to rest and men and women would offer *arti* and *pūja*. Penelope Chetwode had recorded an experience of a Goddess procession when *devata* Markanda was taken out for a ceremonial bath.* Mention has been made about the processions in Dussehra ceremony of Kulu. The masks and the *raths* (chariots) are stored carefully for future use in the processions. Usually for important religious fairs such *devata* processions are taken out. We find this type of *devata* procession at the *melas* of Manikaran, Bunthar and other places. Quite a number of *devatas* in different villages are brought to Manikaran for the annual ritual bath and pilgrims have a dip in the same waters to earn *pūn* (virtue). Manikaran attracts a large number of pilgrims and visitors.** It is natural that when even important deities (*devatas*) are taken out in procession and people offer their *pūjas* to them the importance of the temples where the deities are located will, somehow, abate.

In Kulu valley itself there are about twenty well-known temples that have been built exclusively of stone. It has been concluded that they mostly originated from 17th century and were meant to propagate the cult of Vishnu. Vishnu worship does not need any animal sacrifice. The Vishnu worship was, more or less, substituted for the earlier Goddess cult and the worship of the local *devatas* which needed sacrifice of animals. According to legend in one or two temples human sacrifice also used to be offered. There have been no human sacrifices reported in the last one century or so.

The other temples and mostly those in the rather inaccessible areas are either entirely of wood or alternate courses of wood and stone. The forest has abundance of good timber for such purposes.

The Kulu temple-architecture needs a brief mention. Dr. Vogel has left a good description of the architecture of

* *Kulu, The End of the Habitable World*, by Penelope Chetwode, (John Murray, 1972.)

** It is reported in the newspapers that the Himachal Government intends setting up a large hotel at Manikaran.

some of the temples and there has hardly been any improvement on them.* Vogel hesitated to commit himself to a definite or even approximate date of origin of the largest stone temples in Kulu, namely the temples of Visheshar-Mahadev. He side-tracks the issue of a date of origin by the observation: "The excellent workmanship of the large bas-reliefs and, in fact, all the sculptural decorations on the Bajoura temple, points to an early date." Later researchers have concluded that the Bajoura temple of Visheshar-Mahadev is somewhat later in date than the Sun temple at Martand in Kashmir. According to this theory the origin of the Bajoura temple could be placed somewhere in the late 8th or early 9th century. A more recent theory is that the panels were probably carved by the Pala sculptors in the 11th century,** when many artisans took refuge into hills after the conquest of Kanauj by Mahmud of Ghazni in 1018. Dr. Goetz, however thinks that these sculptures on Bajoura temple are probably 11th century copies of 7th century originals.*** These theories appear rather far-fetched. We have no evidence that the Pala sculptors whose exquisite specimens could be seen in the Museum in Patna ever went to this area. Nor is there any evidence that the sculptors used to copy older originals. Indian sculptors had, more or less, an aristocracy and sense of dignity and we have not got much evidence that they ever did copy originals, except in very rare cases when ordered by the rulers.

The Bajoura temple of Visheshar-Mahadev could be taken as a typical specimen of the Kulu valley workmanship in the temples. The *shikhara* has decorative motifs,—the pot, creepers, and foliage pattern on the outer covering. The *garbhagriha* with doors jambs are carved with figures of flowers and patterns of creepers and leaves. The three sides of the temple leaving the open door way to the *garbhagriha* have carvings, sculptured deities including the figure of Durga, the emblem, of good, slaying *Mahishasur*, the emblem of evil. The Durga Devi has a crown and eight arms holding different

* J. Ph. Vogel: *Archaeological Survey of India Report*, 1909-10.

** Madanjeet Singh, *Himalayan Art*. Unesco, 1968.

*** Hermann Goetz, *The Early Wooden Temples of Chamba* (Memoirs of the Kern Institute No. 1).

weapons, one of which pierced in the heart of the buffalo-demon.

The Siva temples in this complex usually have a Nandi bull made out of a block of stone, large or small. There is usually a *mandapa* and a *garbhagriha* with the phallic emblem (*lingam*) of Lord Siva. The Siva temple at village Dasha about half a mile from the Nagar-Manali road is a typical example of small Siva temples of which we have quite a number. There is a tower and the usual sculpture mentioned before. There are two female figures in the heavy-type of a female which was accepted as an example of an Indian beauty. Penelope Chetwode obviously makes a mistake when she thinks that these figures are more likely to be *dvarapalas*. Such female figures particularly with the trident are not usually associated with *dvarapalas*.

The Dungri temple of goddess Hirma Devi or Hidimba of the Mahabharata is another remarkable temple in this complex. As already mentioned the deity is taken out to pay an annual visit and homage to Raghunathji elsewhere. In the midst of tall and ancient deodar trees this old temple in pagoda style stands. It has been, according to current legend, taken that this was the site for a Buddhist monastery before and the temple had some Buddha image which has now disappeared. The present temple was constructed by Raja Bahadur Singh who built Nagar Kasal. The legend is that the sculptor's hands were cut off after the temple was completed so that he could not build another similar temple. The carving in the folk-style covers foliage motifs, gods and goddesses, animals and crocodiles in a detailed way. The Dungri temple has two small brass images of Durga and by another strange permutation Hidimba who was originally a demoness merged into Durga by killing the buffalo-demon. Hidimba is also believed to be a deity associated with rain. As the area depends more on rain for cultivation of edible crops, Hidimba the demoness-deity commands a deep reverence. Manaligarh has a stray image of Durga and her lion, which has been somehow damaged. Penelope Chetwode visited at Gushaini village a small wood-temple with remarkable Pahari folk art carving. The posts have carvings of scrolls, *Hanuman* (Monkey-god),

peacocks etc. On the door jambs there are *Nag* motifs and the icon is of a female goddess in black stone. The deity is taken to be that of Gara-Durga. According to legend Gara-Durga Devi was the daughter of a high caste Thakur of Dethua village in Kothi Kot. A mason of Bandal pleased the Thakur immensely by some work and the Thakur promised that he would be given any reward he wanted. The mason impudently wanted Gara, the Thakur's beautiful daughter. The Thakur was nonplussed but he had to satisfy his conscience by presenting the daughter to the low caste mason. The girl Gara was extremely unhappy at her fate and wept bitterly sitting by the bank of the Tirthan river near Bandal village. The river goddess was moved and took her down and she was, henceforth, worshipped as a Devi.

3.

SHYAMA KALI TEMPLE AT MANDI

At the top of Mandi town there is a temple of Shyama Kali deity which is another manifestation of the consort of Lord Siva. It is said that the divine spouse once started dancing and in her joy she lost herself and went on with a fierce dance putting the three worlds in danger. Siva, her husband, was approached to do something and Siva quietly laid himself on her route of dance. When Kali had put her feet on prostrated Siva she came to herself and stopped. In this manifestation the spouse Kali is painted black on the face and she looks fierce with her garland of skulls and tongue protruding out of remorse for treading on her husband's body.

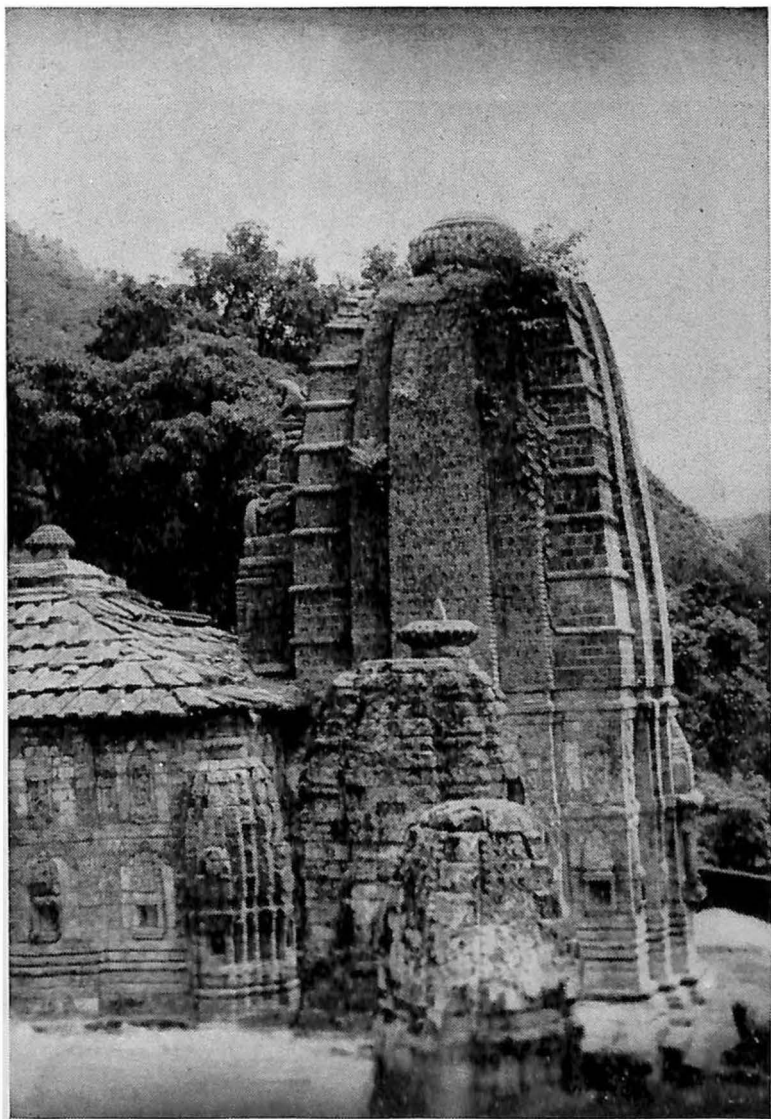
Raja Shyam Sen ruled Mandi from 1664 to 1675 and he was a great devotee of the deity Kali. Raja Jit Sen of Suket, ruler of the adjoining State, insulted Shyam Sen and Shyam Sen invaded Suket. He prayed and invoked the blessings of Kali before he set out. On his victory he was said to have built the temple and installed the deity. She is popularly known as Tarna Devi. The Sikh kingdom after the death of Maharaja Ranjit Singh in 1839 passed through bad times.

During the rule of Maharaja Kharak Singh of the Sikh kingdom the army became almost uncontrollable. Kharak Singh had left all the powers in the hands of his son Naunihal Singh.

Naunihal Singh hit upon the strategy of invading Mandi and Kulu to give an opportunity to the army for fight and loot. Mandi and Kulu had given no cause for the invasion.

However, General Ventura led a strong Sikh force to Mandi. General Ventura stopped within seven miles of the Mandi town and demanded some payment which was made. Raja Balbir Sen of Mandi was called upon to visit the General in his camp on the pretext of receiving a *Khilat*.

On his arrival the Raja was imprisoned and Mandi town was occupied. Balbir's imprisonment was followed by the



Grand Old Temple of Mandi.

capture of the Kamlah fortress and the Raja was sent as a prisoner to Amritsar and confined in the fort of Gobindgarh. Kulu was next invaded.

One Goshaon, a clever Minister of Raja Balbir Sen, left the State in the disguise of a domestic servant and went to Lahore. He managed to gain the confidence of the rulers and had himself sent to Gobindgarh fort to work for the prisoner. A plot was hatched by the clever Minister who gave out that Raja Balbir Sen had great spiritual powers (*Siddh Purush*) and could cure incurable diseases by his spiritual power. Some cases came to him and got cured by a touch of the *Jhanda Sahib* (flag post of the Gurudwara by the site of the fort). Maharaja Sher Singh who had become the ruler of Lahore heard of this and when there was a very heavy rain and floods, Raja Balbir Sen was brought to stop the rains and flood. It is said that Raja Balbir Sen prayed and prayed to the goddess Shyama Kali and took a vow that if the calamity was ended and he was released he would decorate the interior of the deity's temple with gold leaf.

It is said that the prayer of Raja Balbir Sen did work and the rains were stopped. Raja Balbir Sen was released with full honours and Mandi State with all that had been looted was restored to him. The Raja fulfilled his vow. Since then the Shyama Kali is held in very great veneration and the temple is visited by thousands of pilgrims every year.

JWALA MUKHI

Jwala Mukhi located at Pong village and on the top of the periphery of the reservoir constructed for damming the Beas river is venerated as a very sacred spot. It is said that when Lord Siva was dancing round the world in fury with the dead body of his spouse Sati and Lord Vishnu with his mace was cutting the body to pieces to relieve Lord Siva and bring him to his senses the tongue of Sati fell at the place which is now known as Jwala Mukhi and from where several flames appeared and continued burning day and night.

The legend is that—

Raja Bhumi Chand Katoch of Kangra, a great devotee of goddess Durga, dreamt of the sacred place and the Raja set people to find out the whereabouts of the site. The site was traced and the Raja built a temple. The burning flames and the complex have come to be known as Jwala Mukhi.

There are nine flames in the temple with the following names :

Mahakali, Unpurna, Chandi, Hinglaj, Bindhya Basni, Maha Lakshmi, Saraswati, Ambika and Anjni Devi.

The story goes that every year an exodus of pilgrims used to be led to the sacred site by one Dhianu Bhagat, a great devotee of Jawalaji. Emperor Akbar became suspicious of such exodus from Delhi every year and got an enquiry made and was told of the truth of the nine flames burning day and night. It is said the Emperor visited the place and had the temple covered with thick metallic plates and yet the flames re-appeared through the plates. Emperor Akbar was satisfied and gave an umbrella of solid gold to the goddess. It is said because of the pride of the ruler the goddess turned the umbrella of gold into an alloy of eight metals (*ashtdhatoo*). This umbrella is still there.

The temple located on a small spur on the Dharamsala-Simla road at a distance of about 20 Kms. from the Jwala Mukhi Road Railway Station attracts lacs of pilgrims every year.

No idol is located in the temple but only the flames which come out from the crevices of the rock are worshipped. They are natural jets of combustible gas.

There is a small platform in front of the temple and there is a big *mandap* where a huge bell of brass is hung presented by the King of Nepal. Usually milk and water are offered and the *ahutis* (oblations) are offered to the sacred flames in the pit situated in the centre of the temple in between the floor pillars supporting the roof. The deity is offered *Bhog* of *Rabri* (thickened milk), *Misri* (candy), seasonal fruits,

milk and *arti* is done. There is a mystic *Yantar* (diagram) of the goddess which is covered with shawls, ornaments etc. and *mantras* are recited. The *puja* has different 'phases' and goes on practically the whole day. *Arti* is done five times in the day. *Havan* is performed once daily and portions of *Durga Saptasati* is recited. Maharaja Ranjit Singh paid a visit to the temple in 1815 and the dome of the temple was gold-plated by him.

Just a few feet above the Jwalamukhi temple there is a six-feet deep pit with a circumference of about three feet. At the bottom of this pit there is another small pit about one and a half feet deep with hot water bubbling all the time. There is a story about these pits devoutly repeated to the pilgrims.

It is said that Guru Gorakhnath once visited Jwalamukhi. The Jwalamukhi Devi requested Guru Gorakhnath to receive her hospitality. Gorakhnath refused to have food even if cooked and served by the Devi as people visiting her were not all strict about their food. On the Devi's repeated request Gorakhnath agreed to cook *khichiri* (rice and dal mixed and boiled with some condiments and served with *ghee*) at her place but said he would go round begging for alms as usual and on return would cook *khichiri* himself. He asked the Devi to keep water boiling so that he could straightaway cook without wasting time.

The Jwalamukhi Devi agreed and kept the hot water boiling but Guru Gorakhnath has not yet returned. The Devi waited and waited and then sent her disciple Naga Arjan to trace the Guru. Naga Arjan failed and started meditating on the top of the Jwalamukhi range. He has not returned also.

The Devi then deputed another disciple Bhim to find out the whereabouts of Gorakhnath and to bring him back. Bhim traced Gorakhnath at the confluence of the Rohini and Tapti rivers. This place has come to be known as Gorakhpur.

The Guru had a begging bowl which would never get filled up though maunds of rice and *dal* (lintels) might be put into it. Similarly he cooked *khichiri* with five seers of

rice and *dal* and the food would never be exhausted though thousands ate.

Bhim made his obeisance to Guru Gorakhnath and conveyed the Devi's desire that he should come to Jwalamukhi and cook *khichiri*. The Guru asked Bhim to retire to his hermitage and rest and that he would wake him when the time will come. So Bhim got into the hermitage and slept. He is still sleeping there, though hundreds of years have slipped by. The Guru has not returned and the Goddess Jwalamukhi is still waiting for the Guru and the hot water in the pit is still bubbling for the Guru to cook his *khichiri*. But Guru Gorakhnath has gone to Nepal from Gorakhpur and is still roaming about in the Nepal forests. He will only come back to Jwalamukhi when the age of *satyajug* returns. In the meanwhile Devi Jwalamukhi must wait on and the water in the pit be bubbling.

The Jwalamukhi shrine is now under the control of the Nath sect of Guru Gorakhnath. It is obvious that the story is a later creation by the Nath sect to enhance the prestige of the Nath cult and to establish the superiority of the cult to the Jwalamukhi deity. But by repetition the story has led to widespread currency and belief in it.



Bhutnath Temple, Mandi.



Deity at Bhutnath Temple, Mandi (Courtesy: H. P. Govt.).

BHOOT NATH TEMPLE

Baba Bhootnath is a manifestation of Lord Siva. It is said one cow would go out and stand near a stone and milk would gush out of her udders. The owner got frightened and the story spread far and wide.

Raja Ajbar Sen of Mandi learnt about the story. The Raja had a dream the very night he was told about it that Lord Siva wanted him dig under the stone. The Raja immediately did so and the idol of Siva was found.

When the present Mandi was founded by Raja Ajbar Sen (1499-1534 A.D.) he built the temple and installed the deity. Baba Bhootnath is the guardian deity of Mandi and the shrine is daily visited by hundreds of devotees.

It is believed that in case there is a severe drought in Mandi water taken from the river Beas should be poured over the deity and it would surely rain by the time the water would trickle down to river Beas again. Newly born babies and calves are brought to Bhootnath God and consecrated to him. People believe this consecration would guard against dangers.

It is a *Shikhara* type of temple. There is a small porch; and a cellar surmounted by a spire. The *Mandap* in front is a later addition. There are fine pillars supporting the porch with capitals carved in elephants, the arch being trefoil.

MANALI WHERE THE WORLD BEGAN

We tread on many legends, Pauranik or otherwise, scriptures and references in old Sanskrit literature, folk-stories when we traverse Kulu-Manali region. Kulu as mentioned was known as Kulantapitha which means the end of the inhabited world. This was so because the area remained secluded from the outside world for a long time. The population was scanty and so the plains people termed it as the land's End. That Rohtang Pass was not negotiable normally in the ancient days till the Gods intervened and opened up two mountain barriers is a common belief.

Dr. Hiranand Shastri had observed :—*

“Kuluntapitha lies to the north-east of Jalandhara and south of Hemakuta mountains. It has 10 *yojans* (about 90 miles) in width. The sacred place of Viyasa lies to its north and the Bandhana mountains to the south. The river Bias flows to its west and Pasupati (Siva) lies to the east. The deity presiding over the valley is Savari. Indrakila is the principal hill. The *Sangama* or confluence of the Bias and Parvati rivers is the chief sacred place. It was in this land that Siva in the guise of *Savara* fought with Arjuna.”

No wonder where men dreaded to tread the Gods frolicked. Kuluta was mentioned in the Mahabharat. As mentioned Hiuen Tsang had left a description of Kuluta along with Lo-u-lo (Lahaul) and Sho-to-lo (Shatadru, i.e. basin of Sutlej).

Mudra Rakshash written in the sixth century by Visakha Datta mentions Kulute. Some assert the book was written in the fourth century.

If Kulu or Kalute or Kulantapitha was the land's end Manali has been taken to be the area where the world began.

* *Archaeological Survey of India Report*, 1907-1908.

The legend is well-known in the area and highly interesting. In different parts of the world the same type of mythology has grown as to the emergence of the human race.

There was a Great Deluge before the emergence of the new race of mankind.

The great sage Manu was warned of the impending calamity by a small fingerling (fish) that wanted protection in lieu of guiding what Manu should do to save himself. A boat was to be built and when the deluge overtakes Manu Maharaj should get into the boat with the seven other great sages (*Sapta-Rishi*) Kashyap, Attri, Vasistha, Visvamitra, Gautam, Jamdagni and Bharadwaj. They should take everything in small quantities for starting re-creation after the deluge had blown over. The fish predicted he would grow big and develop horn and the boat has to be tied to the horn.

The fish was protected and grew and grew. When the water level started rising the fish swam to Manu Maharaj and the boat with the seven sages and the materials was tied tightly to the horn of the fish. Instead of swimming towards the sea, the fish swam towards the Himalayas with the boat.

The Great Deluge blew over and the boat rested high up in the lap of the mighty Himalayas. The seven sages left the boat and went up the mountains for *tapashya* (meditation). Manu descended through the slopes. Manu stopped at a place and started meditation. This place came to be known as *Manuwali* or Manali. The *Bhagavat Puran* mentions the place where the boat rested as Himavat and some associate it with the Himalayan peak Hamta at a small distance from Manali town. The world re-started from Manali through the efforts of Manu Maharaj.

But there was a problem. The seven sages had become *Indriyajit* (victor of the passions) and were just not interested in sex. Lord Brahma was confronted with the problem. Through a sexual method he produced a pair of human beings from his right (Manu) and from his left (Shat Rup). But

the pair had to live like mortals for procreation and the flood waters had permeated the world. Lord Brahma asked Vishnu to drain the earth.

That was done and Manu and Shat Rupa lived together. They had a number of sons and daughters. The first son was Priya Brat and the second was Uttan Pad. There were three daughters who were the main progenitors of the human race. Manu was the author of *Manu-Smriti*. Manu and his wife handed over the State to their sons and retired to the high mountains for *tapashya* (meditation).

The place where they lived is Manali. Manali has an ancient temple of Manu. It is only in Kulu valley that Manu is worshipped as an important deity. According to tradition in the *Treta Yuga*, Raja Dasarath and Rani Kaushalya were the reincarnation of Manu and Shat Rupa.

THE LEGEND ABOUT THE NAME MANDI

Mandavya Rishi a great saint with considerable supernatural powers and deep knowledge of the scriptures lived in a hermitage and used to meditate on a rock named as Kolsra, situated on the left bank of the Beas river at Mandi. In the olden days, it used to be on the right bank but the course of the river had changed.

The sage was in deep meditation when the King's Policemen followed a band of thieves and came to Mandavya Rishi's hermitage. The saint was asked if he knew where the robbers had gone but as he was in meditation he did not care to reply. The robbers had actually taken shelter in the hermitage after concealing the booty.

The Police Chief was mightily annoyed as he thought that Mandavya was posing to be a saint. They searched and discovered the booty. They pounced upon the Rishi taking him to be the leader of the gang. The matter was reported to the king who without applying his mind ordered that Mandavya be put on a *Shool* (a sharp-pointed planted iron shaft) which would immediately pierce a man through.

Mandavya was still in a meditation trance and though put on the *Shool* it did not pierce him through. He was kept hanging for days while he was continuing in his meditation.

The neighbouring *Rishis* heard of this and rushed to the king. The king was amazed that any man could survive a *Shool*. He begged the pardon of the saint and immediately set him at liberty.

The sage pardoned the king but approached the "*Dharma Raja*" as to why he was given this punishment. The *Dharma Raja* gave out that as he used to torture animals when he was a child he had to undergo the punishment. Mandavya Rishi thought the punishment was too severe

and cursed *Dharma Raja* to take birth as a man as the perpetrator of uneven justice. Mandavya Rishi was spiritually so high that his curse was implemented.

Mandi takes the name from Mandavya. The name of the place was first Mandav Nagar and then corrupted into Mandi. The interpretation that the town got the name as it was a market place the Hindi equivalent of which is *mandi* appears an after thought. It, however, remains a fact that the place saw a good turn-over of article from Yarkand and Ladakh for the plains.

The earliest mention of the town appears on the inscription at the Triloknath temple, in old Mandi. The Saka year is 1442 corresponding to 1520 A.D.

The Tibetans call Mandi as Zohar and there is a story behind it.

The great Buddhist teacher, Padma Sambhava (A.D. 750-800), went from Mandi or Zohar at the request of the Tibetan King Sronglde Btzan to preach the doctrine of Tantric Buddhism or Lamaism to Tibet.

Pandit Hira Nand Shastri, a noted historian, has observed that in his Lamaist representations Padma Sambhava appears in the ancient Mandi garb and the special head-dress worn by him is still called *Zohorma*.

It is said that many religious scriptures were taken into Tibet from Zohar (Mandi); and during the reign of Langdarma (A.D. 900), the Tibetan King who prosecuted the Buddhists, many books are said to have been brought back to Zohar (Mandi). The Tibetans believe somewhere in Mandi or Zohar hundreds of the scriptures are lying concealed. Some think they might have been taken to Kulu.

THE ARDHNARI TEMPLE, MANDI

The Ardhnari temple at Mandi is, comparatively, a modern temple. The right half of the stone image in the temple represents the Siva and the left half his consort Parvati. Siva has his typical knotted hair and wearing a garland of skulls, an entwined serpent, a musical instrument in one hand and a *Damru* (drum) in the other. The divine consort Parvati is shown wearing a diadem, a pair of earrings and a ring on the nose. The icon is well-executed from all standards.

There is a slab joined to the image on which the vehicles (*Vahan*) of the deities—the bull and the lion, are artistically carved. The images of Bhairon and Hanuman are also there. The temple consists of a cella, porch and a *mandap*. The carvings of the temple are of a high order. Ardhnari icons are rather rare in Northern India and the presence of this icon here is rather strange.

The Krishna Mandir at Mandi raised by Raja Suraj Sen who ruled Mandi State from 1637 to 1664 A.D. with an image of Madhav Rao is held in very high respect. The Raja had a number of sons who all died premature. The worried Raja set up this image and the temple out of remorse. The Raja formally handed over his kingdom to God Madhav Rao and during the rest of his life he ruled as the vicegerent of the God. The image of Madhav Rao (Lord Krishna) made in silver was set up in 1648 A.D. and a Jagir in perpetuity was assigned to him.

Lord Krishna in this icon of Sri Madhav Rao is worshipped with due ceremony on all important occasions. On every important festival, Madhav Rao is taken out in a procession. He is treated as the guardian deity.

It is significant that at the time of accession of the State to the rest of India after Independence, the Raja had to take formal orders from the deity for the merger. The importance

of Madhav Rao is emphasised when on "Shivratri" all the gods and goddesses repair to Mandi to do honour to him.

MAHUN NAG

The temple of Mahun Nag at Bakhari, on Kardog-Simla road perpetuates the snake cult mentioned elsewhere. According to legend Mahun Nag is the incarnation of Raja Karan of Mahabharata fame. An image was discovered by a farmer, while ploughing his fields in village Shandal. The image was brought to Bakhari the present location and there was a lightning and a tree caught fire. It is, however, not known who built the temple.

The legend further asserts that once Raja Shyama Sen of Suket, was imprisoned by the Moghul King at Delhi and kept in a big drum. The deity (Mahun Nag), in the form of honey-bee locally called '*Mahun*' appeared and requested the Raja, to give it a place to stay, in his cell of the prison. The Raja promised to give the deity half of his State, provided he was set at liberty by the Moghul King.

The Mahun Nag assumed the form of a man and became the chess partner of the Moghul King and won the drum containing Raja Shyama Sen of Suket as a trophy.

However, on return the deity refused to take half of Suket State and instead selected a secluded area at Bhakhari. The temple is resorted to by a large number of devotees.

KAMRU NAG

No one knows when and who built the temple for Kamru Nag deity. The location of the temple of Kamru Nag is at village Kamrah in Mandi with no habitation and in the midst of a thick forest.

According to tradition the offerings to the deity are thrown in a small lake nearby. A priest acts as a medium on behalf of the Nag Devta.

There is a peculiar recorded incident. Mr. C. C. Garbett was deputed to work in Mandi State as a Settlement Officer

in 1911. He visited the Kamru Nag area and on learning that all the offerings including ornaments and coins are thrown in the lake by the side of the temple, he wanted to dredge the water, bring out the treasures offered and put them to some use to the villagers. His proposal was opposed by all the devotees. But the officer wanted to carry out his dredging. He was held up at some place due to incessant rains and could not proceed. Mr. Garbett took some wild hill fruits and had a severe attack of dysentery. He would not get cured and had to chuck his job and return to England.

GURDWARA GURU GOBIND SINGH

Mandi figures in the history of Sikh religion. Raja Sidh Sen of Mandi was a devotee of Guru Gobind Singh. The Guru was on a visit in the area and the Raja invited him to stay at Mandi for some time. The Guru accepted the offer but stayed outside the town at a secluded place.

It is said that the place where the Guru stayed was the same where Lomash Rishi had his hermitage. The grey rock on which the Guru meditated is named as 'Kolsara' and the devotees of the Guru have constructed a *Gurdwara* by the side of the rock on the Mandi-Kulu road.

The following story is recorded about the Guru's blessing on Mandi. "One fine morning the Guru wanted to bless the Raja. He ordered the Raja to bring a pitcher and throw it in the running Beas river water, and his devotees were asked to hit the pitcher by a stone. They all failed. The Raja's stone touched the pitcher but it only turned upside down and floated down. At this the Guru told the Raja :

*"Jaise Bachee Ye Handi
Vaise Bachay Teri Mandi
Mandi Ko Jo Loota Ga
Asmani Gola Chhooote Ga"*

"Your Mandi will remain safe, just as this pitcher could not be harmed. Anybody, if any one will try to loot Mandi, cannons will be fired."

The Gurdwara at Mandi preserves the following belongings of the Guru :

1. Hammerless Muzzle Loading Gun, $7\frac{1}{2}$ feet long and weighing 22 seers.
2. Mattress made of pure silk.
3. Karpan (sword)
4. Rabab (Indian violin)
5. Charpoy (cot).

Prof. Manmohan in his book, "History of Mandi State" mentions :

"It was this time (probably in 1701) that, harassed by his enemies but quite undaunted and firmly believing in eventual victory, Guru Gobind Singh, who had sought refuge with the Raja of Kulu with a view to enlisting his sympathy and seeking his help in the noble task of emancipating the Hindus from the Mohammadan yoke and saving the Hindu religion from extinction, came to stay in Mandi. The Kulu Raja, with whom Guru Gobind Singh had been staying just before his migration to Mandi seemed to be devoid of the spirit of chivalry and of love for his motherland. Instead of helping the Guru Sahib, he imprisoned him and shut him up in an iron cage. He forgot, however, that to a great man "Stone walls, do not make a prison, nor iron bars a cage", and the Guru was soon able to escape and make his way to Mandi. Here Raja Sidh Sen had a premonition of the coming of the Guru, and, on the latter's arrival, offered him a warm welcome and treated him with the greatest respect. The place where the Guru stayed at Mandi was until recently a small tumble-down hut, but thanks to the sympathetic interest of the present enlightened Ruler, and as the result of the efforts of Rai Bahadur Diwan Dina Nath, the present Chief Minister to His Highness, a fine Gurdwara has been built at the sacred spot and the memory of the Guru's visit is thus kept green. The Gurdwara is situated just above the precipitous bank of the river Beas on the present motor road to Kulu,. The Guru deliberately selected this secluded spot in spite of the request

of Raja Sidh Sen who was anxious to lodge him as an honoured guest in his palace. Right in the bed of the river and just below the Gurdwara there is still to be seen a huge rocky boulder of a greenish grey colour on which the Guru used to perform his spiritual devotions. A quieter, cleaner and a more picturesque place could not have been chosen. This boulder has survived more than two centuries of corrosion by the waters of the rapid Beas, and apart from the superstition which usually winds itself round such objects, there seems no doubt that it will continue to greet the eyes of a devout-pilgrim for a very long time to come."

"The local tradition asserts that during his brief stay in Mandi, Guru Gobind Singh gave many proofs of his miraculous powers. When Guru Gobind Singh left Mandi Raja Sidh Sen escorted him upto the State boundary. To commemorate his visit, the Guru was requested by the Raja to lay the foundation-stone of the fortress named Guru Kot. The Guru returned the courtesy by asking the Raja to perform a similar ceremony in respect of a fortress named Sidh Kot. Some manuscripts of the Guru were highly prized by Sidh Sen and kept in safe custody in the treasure house at Kamloh."

Rewalsar is a small lake at a distance of about twenty kms. from Mandi town on Mandi-Hamirpur road. This is surrounded by three famous temples of Lord Siva, Padmasambhava, and a Gurdwara. Thus it is a place of pilgrimage for the Hindus, Buddhist and Sikhs alike. There are a few small floating islands with reed grass over them. Occasionally they move and traditionally this is taken to be very auspicious.

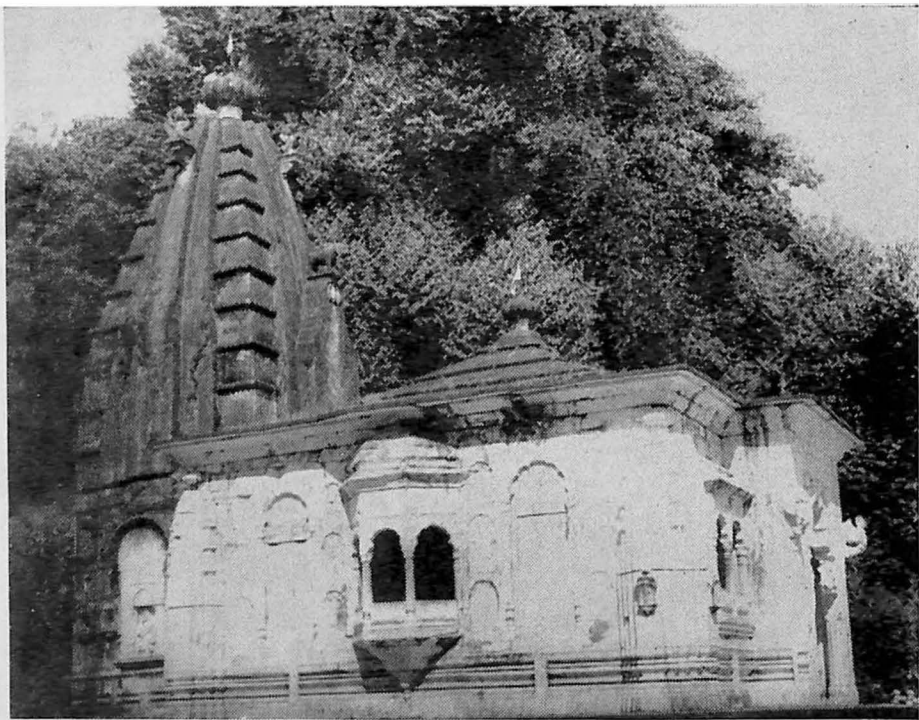
BUDDHA TEMPLE

The Buddha temple (Gompa) is supposed to have come into existence during the eighth century when Padmasambhava Buddha the second and the originator of Lamaism or the Tantrik cult of Buddhism (Vajrayan) emanated. It is believed that Padmasambhava selected Mandi for his spiritual exercise. He came miraculously to this kingdom, particularly to visit the king's renowned daughter Mandharva, to preach her the teachings of Buddhism. She was a religious woman. But the heretic king burnt him alive, on the spot where the present lake, Rewalsar, is existing. Padmasambhava changed the flame and converted it into water and outcame a lake, and Padmasambhava sat upon a Lotus stalk in the midst of the lake. The king then conceded his ignorance and paid homage to Padmasambhava. The King's daughter Mandharva, who had been put in a deep trench full of thorns, was taken out and allowed to follow the Preacher's teachings.

The Lamas have built a beautiful *Gompa* or a Buddhist temple on the spot. There is a huge idol of Padmasambhava as the presiding deity. The image is flanked by the idols of Tara Devi and Lord Buddha. A number of wheels (wooden or metallic) have been fixed all round the temple with the Buddhist *Mantrams* carved in Tibetan script.

During the month of 'Phagun,' on a particular day, which is supposed to be the birthday of Padmasambhava, a fair is held at Rewalsar. A considerable number of Tibetans, Lahaulis and Kinnauris turn up on that day to pay homage to him regarded as the incarnation of Lord Buddha.

On this auspicious day, a special dance is arranged in which fifteen to twenty men participate and it continues for two to three hours. This dance is called '*Chhambh*' dance. An image of the second Buddha is also taken round in a chariot. The long pole fixed in the compound of the shrine is replaced after covering it with cloth having five colours, amidst the



Riwalsar Temple at Mandi (Courtesy: H. P. Govt.).

chanting of Buddhist prayers. The colours used are blue, yellow, red or pink, white and green.

According to the Buddhist faith, the Padmasambhava meditated somewhere here for 25 years.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama and His Holiness the Panchan Lama visited the shrine during the year 1957. In memory of their visit, they planted two trees of *Magnolia Grandiflora* which are now in full bloom.

Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of the Sikhs, had visited Rewalsar during a three-day Balmiki fair. The Sikhs have built a Gurudwara here in memory of his visit.

The place is also sacred to the Namdhari Sikhs. They believe that the founder of the Namdhari sect, Satguru Shri Ram Singh Ji will appear in the Rewalsar area in person, some time or the other. They also believe that when there will be a deluge (*Maha Pralay*) the Rewalsar area will remain safe and those living in this area will survive.

The Rewalsar visit of the tenth Guru was a great occasion as he came from Anandpur Sahib and camped for sometime preaching. The Rajas of Srinagar (Garhwal), Chamba, Nadaun, Mandi, Karamgarh, Kangra, Kutler, Jaswan, Bushair, Kulu, Kuinthal etc., visited the Guru and heard his preachings. Subsequently the Ranis and other ladies also paid their homage and received blessings from him. On his return journey he halted at Mandi.

Regarding the Siva temple at Rewalsar it is said that Maharishi Lomas had meditated for several thousand years at Rewalsar. Lord Siva was pleased with his *tapashya* and asked him if he wanted a boon. Lomas desired that Lord Siva should have a permanent abode at that place. Lord Siva agreed, and hence Rewalsar is very sacred to the Saivaites.

The Siva temple on the Western Side of the tank is very old though the exact age is difficult to ascertain. It is built on the *Shikhara* style. It is said the ancient name was Lomashsar and later on, the name was converted to Rewalsar or Rawalsar.

THE LEGEND OF BIJLI MAHADEV.

The Rig-Veda has a prayer of Maharishi Vashishta to Lord Rudra to absorb the excessive electric current within himself. It is said Lord Rudra acceded and absorbed the excessive electricity current and saved mankind. According to legend this episode took place at the *sangam* (confluence) of Parvati and Beas rivers. This is one of the very popular stories in the mythological background of Beas basin, in Himachal Pradesh. As expected the devotees had set up a temple and the *lingam* in it is named Bijleshwar Mahadev or Bijli Mahadev.

There is a popular story. After about 12 years regularly there is a frightful lightning and the *lingam* is reduced to pieces. It is said that Lord Siva absorbs the energy discharged from the atmosphere and saves the world. The temple *pujaris* collect pure cow's butter and the broken pieces of *lingam* are put in the butter which works as an adhesive and the *lingam* is reset. The work of resetting the *lingam* is carried out in secrecy by the *pujaris* (priests) and the *Kardars* (employees) of the temple.

The temple is located opposite the Kulu town and on top of a hill crest. The journey has to be negotiated by a rough climb. Two *nandis* (bulls) face the door of the temple. The big wooden pole of deodar on the ground of the temple is said to receive the first brunt of the electric shock. The door frames have a delicate and superb carving. The *mela* in the month of *Sravan* at this place attracts thousands of people.

THE LEGEND AS HOW IDOL-WORSHIP BEGAN

According to legend Maharishi Jamdagni after his return from his pilgrimage at Kailash to Kulu had repaired to village Malana. He had his hermitage at Malana.

On his return Maharishi Jamdagni carried on his head a basket full of eighteen images of different gods. When he was crossing the high Chanderkhani mountain there was a fierce storm and the basket with the idols was thrown off and scattered to distant places. The images made themselves into gods. Each image was covered with a basket, called Kardu, Kardee, Karandee or Kande in Kulu dialect. Till this time the gods did not take any shape. The legend is that when people started worshipping the idols, they started idol-worship. Kulu valley was the originator of idol-worship.

The convention of all the eighteen gods is at village Nagar. The spot is known as '*Jagti*'. All the gods of the Kulu are taken to Nagar valley regularly and *Yajnas* are held. Whenever a calamity befalls the country, the gods of Kulu get together at '*Jagti*'. This meet is called '*Jagti Poochh*'. This ceremony of a convention of Gods is indigenous to Kulu valley. If there is a calamity there is a special '*Jagti*' and the cause of the calamity is divined and steps are taken by *Yajna*, *puja* and sacrifice. Some of the devotees fast when '*Jagti*' is held.

A large rectangular flat stone known as *Singhashan* is shown where the main God is supposed to take his seat. The stone is so heavy that in the legend mentions the gods themselves in the shape of honey-bees carried the stone from Bha-righutung mountain about 10 miles away.

HADIMBA

Hadimba, a *Rakshashi* in the Mahabharat has been deified and is worshipped in this area.

According to Mahabharat Hadimb Rakshash ruled some of the sub-mountainous tracts of the Himalayas. His sister was Hadimba or Hidimba.

In their wanderings the Pandavas, along with their mother, after escape from the wax house unhurt came to the territory of Hadimb Rakshash. Bhima fell in love with Hadimba, the sister of the ruler. Bhima could marry her only after killing the brother.

The pair-lived in the valley for about a year after which Bhima joined his brothers and mother. Hadimba gave birth to a son who was named Ghototkachh. Till Ghototkachh was a minor, Hadimba looked after her country. She retired to the inner hills, for meditation, when her son Ghototkachh, a great warrior took over the country. Ghototkachh was a good administrator.

Dhungri was the place near Manali where Hadimba had resorted for meditation. A temple of Hadimba in pagoda style was raised and she became Devi Hadimba. Hadimba had supernatural powers owing to *tapashya* and was kind to her people.

Hadimba became the patron-deity of the Rajas of Kulu. The Tilak ceremony of every Raja of Kulu has to be done with the permission of the goddess and after worshipping her a buffalo is sacrificed.

Certain ceremonials where the patron-deity is closely associated have to be performed in the Dussehra festival of Kulu. The Dussehra festival is held at Dhalpur Maidan and as mentioned the idol of Raghunathji is taken there. From his temple the goddess Hadimba blesses the ceremonial horse. The ceremony is called as '*Ghor Pooja*'.

The pagoda type wooden temple of the goddess at Dhungri is according to Hira Nand Shastri, the antiquarian about 500 years old. No idol is enshrined and only a foot-print on a stone is kept within.

Raja Bahadur Singh who built the temple is commemorated by a fair held on the first of *Savan* annually named as 'Bahadur Singh Re Jatar.' This *Mela* is also called as *Saroo-hni*, which is symbolic of the completion of the transplanting of paddy.

Hadimba goddess has been humanised by the people and made their own. On the first of 'Jaith', or 14th of May, another *Mela* is held to celebrate birthday of the goddess Hadimba. This *Mela* is held in the Dhungri forest. It lasts for three days. Thousands of men, women and children participate in the *Mela*. Rice-bear (*Lungri*) flows among both men and women who make themselves merry in music and dance.

There is another indigenous ceremony. The deities, Kartikswami of Simsa, Chhandal Rishi of Parsha, Shrishti Narayan of Aleo, Shriganh of Jagatsukh, Vishnu of Shajla, Maladevi of Sial and Sankh Narayan of Nasogi, are brought in processions with proper music by their followers to Dhungri. On the 4th day, the fair shifts to the temple of Manu in the village Manali. The Dhungri forest provides a grand setting to the assemblage of hill women in their colourful clothes.

THE LEGEND OF BANASUR

Banasur was a mighty Rakshasha who ruled very sternly over the area known in the ancient days as Malana in Kulu complex. To his land came Maharishi Jamadagni with his wife Renuka. Jamadagni liked the sylvan surroundings and wanted to set up his hermitage here. Banasur the wicked Rakshash had been oppressing the people a lot.

Banasur took great offence at the daring of Jamadagni and made up his mind to destroy him. He did not know that Jamadagni was a very learned man and had done years of *tapashya*. Banasur caught hold of Jamadagni and put him in a huge cauldron full of oil and put the cauldron on fire and closed its lids. Days after Banasur took off the lid and found the Rishi alive and deep in meditation. The cauldron was again put on fire and more fuel was added. A few days after the lid was again taken off and the Rishi was still alive in the same meditation pose while the oil was boiling.

This time Banasur got frightened and brought out the Rishi and fell on his feet penitent. The Rishi gave out he would forgive him but the Asur must leave the area. Banasur agreed but begged that the peculiar dialect of the area known as *Kanash* be not uprooted. Jamadagni had no objection. He did not mind that Banasur should be remembered through the dialect as people would then realise the ultimate end of wickedness.

Banasur left but the people were still afraid if he ever returned. An effigy of Banasur was made and kept in a cage which was locked up in a cellar. The idea was to destroy the effigy if Banasur would ever return and that would put an end to his life. The cellar known as "*Raksa Ra Mord*" is never opened. It would be opened only if Banasur visits. Once a year a goat is sacrificed outside the cellar.

The *Kanashi* dialect only confined to the village Malana still lingers. The dialect is not spoken anywhere else. There is no script particular to it. Even some people in the village particularly the Harijans are said to understand the dialect but cannot speak it. *Kanash* dialect is a linguistic riddle, it is gathered.

BASISHTA, THE VILLAGE OF THE HERMITAGE OF BASISHTA MUNI

Basishta village on the left bank of river Beas about 2 miles to the north of Manali town and on the Manali-Keylong main road has a legend behind it.

It is believed to be the place where Basishta Muni, the Guru of the Pandava brothers lived and had his hermitage. The village has two temples. In the first one which is more recent Sri Ramchandra is the presiding deity.

The second temple much more ancient is that of Basishta Muni after whom this village is named. This is a timber-bonded stone temple and the site was the hermitage of the Muni according to legend.

Once upon a time, Sri Ramchandra deputed his younger brother Lakshmana, to this village with a prayer to their Guru Basishta, to make it convenient to visit Ayodhya for the performance of *Asvamedha Yagna* by Sri Ramchandra. Lakshmana prostrated before the Guru and gave the brother's message. The Muni was happy that Sri Ramchandra was solemnizing *Asvamedha Yagna* and promised to accompany Lakshmana for the purpose. As Lakshmana was in fatigue, the Rajguru asked Lakshmana to strike a shaft deep into the ground nearby. Lakshmana did so and as a result hot water gushed out of the ground. Lakshmana took bath in the hot spring. It is believed the same hot springs still continue.

At present there are three water springs in the village. The top-most has very hot water, almost at the boiling point. It is used by the inhabitants for cleaning and boiling of warm clothes, rice etc. In the second one, the temperature is a little lower yet too hot for a bath. The third one has comparatively more temperate water and more popular in use by the villagers.

The name of Beas has been taken after Basishta Muni. Cunningham in his book. 'Journal of a Trip Through Kooloo' mentions that according to tradition the saint Basishta became weary of life, tied his hands and feet together and threw himself into the river. The river would not have him, the knots had burst and he was floated to the bank safe. This story, however, does not appear in any old book and appears a touched up story. There is no reason to think Basishta Muni should think of committing suicide. Just above Manali the village Basishta stands. Cunningham mentions :—

"The valley of the Beas closes in; and the gneiss rocks which have been thrust up through the Mica-slate are scrapped on both sides of the valley forming apposing cliffs; which rise to a high somewhat greater than the level of Manali and Basishta Muni."

TEMPLES AND LEGENDS OF CHAMBA

Chamba, formerly a princely State for centuries is now a district and very important for its historical associations, antiquities, natural features, temples and legends. The district derives its name from the main town which is now the district headquarters. It lies mostly astride the main Himalayas and is bounded on the North-West and West by Jammu and Kashmir, on the North, the North-east and East by Ladakh area of Jammu and Kashmir and Lahul and Spiti, and on the South-east and South by the districts of Kangra and Gurdaspur. The mountain systems and ranges along with riverbasins determine the natural divisions. There are three well defined snowy ranges and a number of rivers, including the Bias, Ravi and Chenab. The springs, mountain glades, peaks, snow fields, glaciers, ice caves, valleys, high passes, forests and pastures make the district extremely interesting. The flora is typical Sub-Himalayan and Himalayan. Some specimens of fauna and avi-fauna are rare.

More than ninety per cent of the population follows the Hindu religion. There are some Arya-Samajis, Buddhist Tibetans, Muslims, Christians and Tribals who follow their semi-animistic faith. Even the traditional Hindus have not discarded certain beliefs like worship of trees, mountains or spirits of the soil. The *Nag* cult (serpent worship) has a stronghold. But Siva and Shakti and the latter in various forms along with Vishnu are the three well-known traditional Hindu gods that have a strong hold on the Hindus of this district.

The district as a princely State was under the rule of progressive and staunch Hindu Rajas and a large number of temples owe their origin to the princes. One of them, Raja Sahil Varman in the tenth century was particularly noted for his religious zeal and was apparently a staunch believer in Vishnu cult. Most of the Vishnu temples are concentrated in Chamba town and Lakshmi Narayan temple is the most important one. The temple of Nar Singh at Brahmaur,

Thakur Murli Manoharji at Raj Nagar and of Nar Singh at Bartgal in pargana Bhalai are some of the other important Vishnu temples.

The cult of Siva is more ancient and has a wider sphere of influence. This is natural because the Himalayan range, her many peaks, the Kailash mountain, lakes etc., are taken to be the traditional home of Lord Siva. King Meru Varman in the seventh century A.D. is said to have built a number of Siva temples. A mountain peak Mani Mahesh Kailash and a small lake called "Dal" are supposed to be the permanent abode of Lord Siva and the whole pargana of Brahmaur where they are located is known as *Siva Bhumi*. The principal Siva temples are those of Chander Gupt, Trimukha and Gaurishanker, the Mani Mahesh temple and the Ganesh temple at Brahmaur. Whenever a new house is constructed some religious rites and homage to Lord Siva are done. This is known as *Niwala* which is a corruption of *Nav-Alay* or consecration of newly built house. *Niwala* ceremony has been extended to other domestic events like births, marriages etc.

Naturally because of Lord Siva his consort Durga or Parvati or Uma has also a very popular place. She is more popularly known as the Devi and faith in Devi and Devi worship is a part of the domestic life throughout the district whether there are Devi temples or not in the neighbourhood.

Besides the very popular Devi temple of Lakshana Devi at Brahmaur the temples of Shakti Devi at Chittari, Chamunda Devi at Chamba and Devi Kothi, Minghal Devi at Pangi and Mirkula Devi at Lahul along with another number of lesser known Devi temples have satisfied the faith of the people in Devi worship. One particular feature of Devi worship in many of the districts of Himachal Pradesh is also noticed in this district. Usually the priest known as the *pujari* or *chela* is said to be possessed occasionally by the deity which is signified by an abnormal behaviour in the priest by shivers, random talks and at times using a strange lingo. For all this he is commonly known as the *chela* and during this

period of abnormality he is supposed to be the go-between of the deity and the devotee. The *chela* in this trance prescribes medicines, gives directives for action etc. The *chelas* are not always restricted to Brahmin or Rathi somewhat parallel to a Rajput caste but may also be a low caste men.

There are some popular legends about some of these Devis. A landlord found one of his milching cow coming back drawn dry. He suspected the cowherd of milking the cow while grazing in the forest. He followed the cowherd from a distance and found that the cow was standing still at a particular spot under a tree and milk coming out from her udders. He saw the cow doing this on several successive days. The man had a dream that the goddess wanted to be taken out from the spot and duly installed in a temple. He dug out the place and found an image. While taking that image home he was made a halt involuntarily at a certain spot. He raised a temple and the deity of Chittari stands there.

Chittari temple has an annual fair. The deity is taken to be *Adi Shakti* (primeval energy). There is an inscription on the temple indicating that Raja Meru Varman (A.D. 700) had raised it. One Gugga is believed to have been the mason. It is said that Gugga had built a splendid house for a Rama and as a reward he had his right hand chopped off so that he could not reproduce another house like that. When this mason was taken for consultation for the construction of the temple at Chittari his lost hand was miraculously restored and he built the temple.

At Minghal village there is a famous Devi temple. It is said a widow with seven sons lived in a double-storey house. There was a strange occurrence when a black stone emerged at the fire place where the widow was cooking. The lady started shivering and realised she had been possessed by a deity. She ran out and called her sons that a Devi had appeared at their house. The sons made a joke about the Devi and said if the Devi would be able to make them plough with a single

bullock instead of a pair of them. Immediately the sons were turned into stones. That strange image which had come out is worshipped as Minghal Devi. Strangely enough ploughing with a single bullock is common at this village.

An annual fair is held where one hundred sheep and goats are sacrificed.

Although the temples at Chamba the later capital of the erstwhile Chamba State for centuries and now the district headquarters are better known it is Brahmaur village about 39 miles from Chamba that is the Siva Bhumi or the area where the cult of Siva predominates. Brahmaur was originally known as Brahmapura and was a seat of Brahmani Devi the patron goddess of the valley. The temple of Brahmani Devi deity is very near to Brahmaur. Maru Varman the founder of the Chamba State had Brahmaur as his capital. Maru Varman was supposed to have his ancestral home at Ayudhya and Chamba State was first known as Ayudhya. After about 400 years the capital of the State was removed to Chamba.

A description of the temples of Brahmaur has been summarised as follows :—

“These ancient edifices are grouped together in a distinct compound well-known and held high in faith and esteem as the Chaurasi or Churasi. According to legend, shortly after the accession of Sahil Varma, the ruler of Brahma-pura (Brahmaur), eighty-four yogies visited the place. They were greatly pleased with the raja's piety and hospitality, and stayed there for a considerable time, rewarding the raja with the birth of a son, as an heir, followed by nine more sons and a daughter. It is this daughter, named Champavati, who, as has been mentioned earlier, is said, according to one version, to have lent Chamba its name which is originally believed to have been Champa. It is in commemoration of this visit by these eighty-

four yogis that the temple arena is believed to have been called *chaurasi*.

The following temples still exist :—

<i>Sl. No.</i>	<i>Name of temple.</i>	<i>Deity</i>	<i>Material of the idol.</i>
1.	Shri Harihar.	Shivling	Stone
2.	Shri Nar Singh Bhagwan.	Nar Singh	Brass
3.	Shri Lakshana Devi.	Bhagwati (Goddess).	Brass
4.	Shri Ganeshji.	Ganeshji	Brass
5.	Shri Dashnam Akhara.	Shivling	Stone
6.	Shiv Daivala.	Shivling	Stone
7.	Nandigan.	Nandi (bull).	Brass
8.	Shri Kantheshwar Mahadev.	Shivling	Stone
9.	Shivalaya (Mani Mahes).	Shivling	Stone
10.	Shri Sitalaji,	Bhagwati (Goddess).	Stone
11.	Ardhgaya.	Tirath Talab (tank).	Stone
12.	Shri Suryaling.	Shivling.	Stone
13.	Shri Mauniling.	Shivling.	Stone
14.	Shri Jyotiling.	Shivling	Stone
15.	Shri Mahadevji.	Shivling.	Stone
16.	Shri Trameshwarji,	Shivling	Stone
17.	Shri Nakeshwarji.	Shivling	Stone

The rest, it is believed, have come under debris. While each and every temple is of highly valuable archaeological interest, the temple of Lakshana Devi is, in addition, remarkably impressive in the extremely fine wood work on it.

In order to save the monuments from decay and destruction the Archaeological Department of the Government of

India has brought the following temples etc., scattered all over the district, within the fold of the Protected Monuments:—

<i>Serial number.</i>	<i>Locality.</i>	<i>Name of monument.</i>
1.	Chamba town.	Shri Lakshmi Narayan temple.
2.	„	Bansi Gopal temple.
3.	„	Hari Rai temple.
4.	„	Sita Ram temple.
5.	„	Chamunda Devi temple.
6.	Sarotha pargana Panjala.	Rock sculpture depicting Sita, Ram, Hanuman etc.
7.	Chitrari.	Shakti Devi temple.
8.	Brahmaur.	Lakshana Devi temple.
9.	„	Mani Mahes temple.
10.	„	Nar Singh temple.
11.	„	Ganesh temple.
12.	Bhurdhiadh in Chamba town.	Bajreshwari temple.”

Chamba town celebrates a number of religious festivals. The Minjhar fair held on the 3rd Sunday of *Sawan* month has a very large gathering. There is a procession from the palace along the main thoroughfare to the river bank. Here the river goddess is propitiated. Previously a buffalo used to be pushed into the river as an offering but now only coconuts are thrown into the river. The word Minjhar means maize flower. The fair is a symbolic homage to the river goddess for a successful maize crop and at the time of the fair maize is in flower. A tassel of the golden coloured maize thread is worn by the worshippers and this is called minjhar.

There is a lake Ghadasaru about half a mile in circumference and at an altitude of about 11,500 feet about 16 miles from Tisa, the headquarters of the Chauras tahsil. There is a Kali temple at this place. The lake has become a place of pilgrimage after this was discovered by the Geological Survey of India. The forgotten surveyor who actually discovered

the lake with the help of the compass is commemorated as the *Kapasibabu*.

The temple of Det Nag is located at Kilar about 68 miles from Chamba. This temple being in the midst of a rather inaccessible area is not much visited. It is said that Det Nag used to be propitiated with human sacrifice before. There is a legend that it was the turn of the only remaining son of a poor widow, and before the time of sacrifice she was bewailing her misfortune. A man belonging to the Gaddi caste happened to pass by and volunteered to replace her son. He, however, stipulated that the Nag should be allowed to devour him alive, and, on his presenting several parts of his body in succession without any result, he got angry and threw the Nag into the Chander Bhaga. It got out of the river at Kilar and being found by a cowherd was carried upto the site of the present temple, when it fell from his back with the face on the ground. A shrine was erected and the image set up with its face looking inwards; and a clump of cedar trees at once grew up around the shrine. A buffalo used to be sacrificed before every third, fifth or seventh year in the month of *Katik* at this temple of the Nag. This has now been given up.

Chamba is rich in archaeology, ancient temples, inscriptions and copper-plate title deeds. Dr. Vogel of the Archaeological Survey of India and Sir Alexander Cunningham had researched into the ancient remains. The rich materials show that the line of rulers and the people were quite advanced. The oldest of the copper-plate title deed was issued by Yugakara Varman, son and successor of Raja Sahila-Varman, the founder of the capital of Chamba (A.D. 920). Maru-Varman appears to be the first historic ancestor according to the *Vansavali*. Earlier to Maru the *Vansavali* traces the forbears from Lord Vishnu and Rama, the hero of the Ramayana and mentions 63 persons in the order of descent. We may omit the earlier references and we stand on more solid grounds from Maru. Maru was an ascetic. Later he married and three sons were born to him and he bestowed a kingdom on each of them.

A later king Meru Varman (A.D. 680) was a great builder and a number of important temples of Chamba are ascribed to him. They are Mani-Mahesha, Lakshmi Devi, Ganesa and Narsingh. There are inscriptions regarding the dedication of the idols excepting Narsingh and also of the Bull in front of Mani-Mahesha. There are other temples probably older to Lakshana Devi at Brahmaur. The image of Shakti Devi at Chhatrari, from its inscription dates from Meru-Varman.

There is an interesting story about the ruler Mushan-Varman (820 A.D.). It is said that king Lakshmi-Varman died without leaving any son but his *rani* was pregnant at the time of his death. The *rani* was removed by the *Wazir* and *Purohit* when the Raja was defeated and met his death. On the way the *rani* gave birth to a son and the baby was left in a cave. When the *Wazir* and the *Purohit* learned about it they came back and found the infant in the cave protected by a large number of mice keeping guard over him. They brought the child back to the mother and both the mother and the child took up her residence in the house of a Brahmin for about nine years without disclosing her identity. Ultimately the Brahmin who was adopted a *guru* by the *rani* recognised a foot-print of the boy as that of a royal person. The mother then disclosed the paternity of the child. The Brahmin took the mother and the child to the Raja of Suket. The Raja of Suket gave protection and ultimately the boy married the Raja's daughter. The name Mushan-Varman was given because of the protection given by the mice. The boy was provided with an army and overran Brahmapura. Killing of mice is prohibited in the Chamba royal family and a mouse caught in the palace is never killed.

A later king Sahila-Varman (A.D. 920) conquered the lower Ravi Valley and transferred the seat of government from Brahmapura to the new capital, which he had founded at Champa.

There are different legends about the origin of the new capital. One story is that after the new capital was founded it was seen that there could be no supply of good water. Sahila-Varman had a water course run from the Sarohita

stream around Shah Madar Hill behind the town. But, somehow, the water did not enter the channel and the priests were consulted as to the cause. The priests held that the spirit of the stream had to be appeased by the sacrifice of either the *rani* or his son. The Raja too had a dream that the son must be sacrificed. The *rani* insisted that she should be substituted for the son. Her wish prevailed and she was buried alive near the village of Balota where the water channel leaves the main stream. As soon as the *rani* was buried, it is said, water started flowing.

The other legend is that the name Champa was given because of Sahila-Varman's daughter Champavati. Champavati was very religious and used to go to the temple and spend hours there. This aroused the suspicion of the king that she had some liaison with the *Sadhu* who lived in the temple. Out of this suspicion the ruler followed the daughter one day with a sword. He found the daughter missing. There was a *Daiva Vani* (divine voice) that since his suspicion was so outrageous that God had taken away the daughter and the ruler was commanded to erect a temple on the spot for the daughter. The temple was built and the daughter is now worshipped as a Goddess. To the people of the area this temple is very sacred. A mela is held in the area surrounding the temple from the 1st to the 21st Baisakh every year.

Sahila-Varman also built the temples of Chandragupta and Kameshwara for two idols of Siva which the Raja took out of the stream near its junction with the Ravi river.

Sahila-Varman was of a very religious disposition and his Guru Charpatnath was highly revered by him and consulted at every step.

There is also a legend about the temple of Lakshmi-Narayana, or Vishnu. It is said that the Raja sent nine of his sons to the marble quarries in the Vindhya Mountains to bring a block of marble for making the image of Siva. The marble was brought but when cut it was found to contain a frog. The slab was useless for the making of the main image but smaller images were made out of it. These were the

Trimukha, or the three-faced image of Shiva, an image of Ganpat now in the Chandra-gupta temple and another goddess Lakshmi.

The Raja again deputed the sons to bring another block. They were all killed by robbers. Then the eldest son Yogakar was sent and with the help of some Sanyasi *gosains*, he was able to destroy the robbers and returned with a slab. This slab was utilised for the image of Vishnu which was set up.

The palace of Chamba was also apparently erected by Sahila Varman. His Guru Charpatnath was commemorated by a temple erected near the Lakshmi-Narayana temple. Some say this shrine was erected later.

Sahila-Varman under the advice of his Guru Charpatnath abdicated in favour of his son, Yugakar and retired to Brahmapura, where he lived in the company of Charpatnath and the other *yogis*. There is an area at Brahmapura known as *Chaurasi*, and according to accepted legend this was the hermitage of Charpatnath where Sahila-Varman lived his last few years.

Regarding the structural and some other details of some of the temples at Chamba we quote from the District Gazetteer of Chamba (1963) based on the researches of number of historians and scholars like Vogel, Hutchison, Hermann Goetz, B. C. Chabra and others** :—

“The chief temple of Chamba, that of Lakshmi Narayan, with its image of white marble, was founded about the time of the introduction of Vishnuism in the hills, but it is impossible to decide how far the present building represents the original shrine. We know at least of one restoration by Raja Partap Singh. Two copper-plate inscriptions issued by this ruler, in A. D. 1582, mention that the temple was consecrated, whence we may infer

** 1. *District Gazetteer of Chamba* (1963).

2. *The Early Wooden Temples of Chamba* by Hermann Goetz.

3. *Antiquities of Chamba State*, Pt. I by J. Ph. Vogel.

4. *Antiquities of Chamba State*, P. II, by B. C. Chhabra.

5. *History of the Punjab Hill States* by J. Hutchison.

that the restoration amounted to a complete renovation of the building. One plate mentions also the Chandragupta temple which belongs to the same group. It is a linga shrine, likewise ascribed to Sahila, the founder of Chamba. Between these two temples there is a modern temple dedicated to Radha Krishna by Sadha, the rani of Raja Jit Singh. According to an inscription in the vernacular, it was consecrated in the *Vikrama* year 1882, i. e., A. D. 1825. The three remaining temples of this group are the temple of Gauri Shankar containing a well modelled brass-image of Shiva and his spouse, the Trimukh linga temple, and the temple of Lakshmi Damodar. Thus, three out of these six temples are dedicated to Vishnu and three to Shiva. There are two more Vishnu temples of the *shikhara* type in Chamba town. Earlier in date is that of Hari Rai, profusely decorated with carvings. Its foundation by Salakara Varman is mentioned in a copper-plate inscription of the eleventh century. The other temple, that of Bansi Gopal, in the vicinity of the place, is of a much later date. In a copper-plate of Raja Balabhadra, of A.D. 1855,*** mention is made of the consecration of a temple of Gopal, which presumably is the one in question, as no other temple of this name is known to exist in the town.

Finally, there are the two *shikhara* temples dedicated to Devi. That of Vajreshwari or Bhagvati outside the town is remarkable for its fine sculpture. The short inscriptions under the niches seem merely to contain the names of the artisans employed in the construction of the building, but give no certain clue to its date. The temple of Champavati on the north side of the *chaugan* contains a stone image of Durga slaying the buffalo-demon. In the courtyard of this temple we note a dilapidated shrine of small size which shelters the images of Vasuki Naga (or Baski Nag) and his wazir. Originally, the *naga* king had a more spacious residence, which was destroyed by fire in the year 1898.

*** Obviously 1955 is a misprint (Author).

Temples at Brahmaur—The *shikhara* temples beyond those in the town are very few in number. At Brahmaur, the ancient capital, there are two buildings of this type. The larger of the two is dedicated to Shiva under the name of Mani Mahes. It is ascribed to Meru Varman, who reigned about A. D. 700, but it is very doubtful whether the present building goes back to so remote a time. This much is certain, however, that the erection of a Shiva temple by Meru Varman is recorded in an inscription on the brass bull which stands in front of the temple. The other *shikhara* temple of Brahmaur, smaller in size and plainer in appearance, contains a brass image of Nar Singh, the man-lion incarnation of Vishnu. Its erection by Rani Tribhuvana Rekha is mentioned in a copper-plate inscription of Yogakara, the son of Sahila, and may, therefore, be placed in the tenth or eleventh century. The Nar Singh temple suffered considerable damage in the earthquake of the fourth April, 1905.

Temple at Saho — A stone temple of a peculiar type is that of Chandra Shekh (Sanskrit *Chandra-Shekhara*) the moon-crowned Shiva, at Saho. It is surmounted by a sloping slate-roof, evidently of modern date. The two remarkable figures, however, on both sides of the entrance bear out that the main body of the building is ancient. An early *Sharada* inscription, discovered at the adjoining village of Sarahan, presumably records the foundation of the Saho temple.

Temple at Udaipur— The small *shikhara* temple at Udaipur, three miles below Chamba, is a specimen of a very late type, as it was erected after the death of Raja Udai Singh which occurred in A. D. 1720. It contains three small-size images of white marble. The central one represents Narayana, the other two Raja Udai Singh and his brother Lachman Singh, who were murdered near the spot where the temple stands. Besides, there is a slab with the effigies of the Raja, and his four ranis and eighteen maid-servants who became sati after his demise. The slab corresponds with the so-called *sati* pillars of Mandi and Kulu. It is the only instance of its kind met with in Chamba. There are, however, scattered all over the district, stones with one or two rudely-carved figures. These

are known as *autar* stones and were erected by the relatives of a man who had died without leaving male descendants to perform the *shraddha* ceremony. The circumstance that Raja Udai Singh died sonless led to the founding of the Udaipur temple, and the slab it contains evidently serves the purpose of an *autar* stone.

Trilok Nath Temple — In the Chander Bhaga Valley only one temple of the *shikhara* type is found. It is the famous sanctuary of *Trilok Nath* 'the lord of the three worlds', which is another name for *Avalokiteshvara*, the popular *Bodhisatva*. It is, probably, with the Bodhi temple at Gaya, the only Buddhist shrine in India which has remained Buddhist up to the present day. It contains a six-armed image of white marble. One right hand is in the gift-bestowing attitude; one of the left hands holds a lotus, the typical attribute of this *Bodhisattva*; and, on his head, he wears the effigy of his spiritual father, the Buddha of Boundless Light, Amitabha. The officiating priest is a lama. *Trilok Nath* is, indeed, equally worshipped by the Buddhists of Lahul, Ladakh and Zaskar, and by the Hindus of the neighbouring hill tracts. It is of special interest to note that the *Trilok Nath* temple is purely Indian in type and must, therefore, be regarded as a monument of Indian Buddhism. The body of the temple is built of stone, and the spire or *shikhara* of small partly-moulded bricks. The porch, supported by two graceful pillars with fluted shafts, is profusely adorned with carvings. Unfortunately, the appearance of the edifice has been completely spoiled by its having been encased in a clumsy, shed-like external structure, which forms an anteroom in front and at the same time provides a procession path round the temple. The whole has, moreover, been thickly white-washed so as to conceal the traces of decay. Engaged in the modern outer wall are two miniature *shikhara* temples in which a number of wooden masks are preserved. At the death of a number of the local rana's (Thakur's) family such a mask is prepared and placed in the temple, from whence it is on no account to be removed. An exception is made for three masks which are used at the *Char* or spring festival, and are said to represent a man, a woman and a demon, called in the local dialect

gami, *mezmi* and *kulinza*. The main substance of the *Char* festival is a performance symbolising the advent of spring and the defeat of winter. The latter, personified as an evil demon, is represented by the bearer of the *kulinza* mask, who is chased by the joint villagers and pelted with snowballs till he retires from the village and drops his mask, after which he joins in a dance with the *gami* and *mazmi* mask bearers. There is evidently no connection whatever between this festival and the cult of *Avalokiteshvara*. The annual fair in honour of this deity, which takes place on the last of *Sawan* is attended with ancient rites and sacrifices of an aboriginal type, which feature of the festival strangely contrasts with the great compassionate Buddha to whom the occasion is supposed to pay homage.

Hill temples — The number of *shikhara* temples in Chamba district, leaving aside the miniature ones, does not exceed fourteen (ten of which are found in the town), but it would be difficult to count temples of the hill type, which are scattered everywhere along the mountain slopes and in the valleys. Their construction is extremely simple. They consist of a small cella, usually raised on a square plinth, and built of layers of rubble masonry alternating with beams of cedar wood. This is surmounted by a sloping roof of slates or wooden shingles supported by wooden posts, which form a verandah or procession-path round the shrine. Of the high pagoda-like roof met with in Kashmir, Kulu and Nepal, no instances are found in Chamba. It is possible that some temples *e. g.*, that at Chitrari, originally had a roof of this kind. Owing to climatic conditions the roofs of these buildings have often to be renewed. It must, however, be admitted that they are well calculated to shelter the shrine against the heavy rain and snowfall peculiar to the hills. Though simple in their architecture, some of these hill temples are of great interest owing to the elaborate decoration of their facades, ceilings and pillars.

Oldest Devi Temple — Chamba can boast of three such temples adorned with the finest wood-carving. They are the temples of Lakshana, at Brahmaur; that of Shakati, at Chitrari and that of Kali, at Mrikula, or Udaipur in Lahul. It

will be noticed that these three are all dedicated to Devi. The Brahmaur and Chitrari temples can be approximately dated; for they contain brass images with inscriptions which record their erection by Meru Varman, and on account of their character may be assigned to about A. D. 700. There is little doubt that the images are contemporaneous with the temples in which they are enshrined. It should be remembered that the timber used for these buildings is the wood of the Himalayan cedar or deodar (*cedrus deodara*) which, if well seasoned, is one of the most durable timbers existing. The carvings which are exposed to the weather, *e. g.*, those on the facade of the Lakshana temple are now much decayed, but, wherever sheltered, they exhibit an excellent state of preservation. This point is especially conspicuous in the carved capitals of the Shakti temple.

Lakshana Devi temple at Brahmaur — The plan of the Lakshana temple differs from the common pattern described above, in that in front of the shrine there is an anteroom, the two being enclosed within a solid wall of rubble and wood masonry which has replaced the verandah. Like so many ancient sanctuaries in India, the Lakshana Devi temple is a ruin kept in good repair because its cult has never been seriously interrupted. But these repairs have been executed without any proper understanding of the original design, in the technique and taste of the local peasant architecture. Thus today the temple appears as a simple hut of wood and rubble construction with a broad, far projecting gable roof covered with slates, very similar to many local shrines all over the hills, but especially to those in Kulu. The facade of this building is of particular interest, as in the style of its decoration it exhibits a close affinity to the architecture of Kashmir and Gandhara, and, indeed, shows traces of classical influence peculiar to the monuments of the north-west. In the centre of its front, however, there rises a masterpiece of wood-carvings, still most impressive despite its present deplorable condition: a richly carved entrance frame on which rests a three-storeyed pediment, in its turn crowned by a triangular gable. The seated figure in the arch is not Kali, as supposed by Cunningham, but *Surya* the sun-god, as is evident from the position

of the legs. His twelve arms, holding various attributes, are presumably indicative of the twelve months of the year. Inside, there is a rectangular *mandapa* supported by four pillars interlinked by railing on both sides. And behind the *mandapa* there opens the quadratic cella, again with a richly carved entrance between other two pillars, enshrining the brass (*ashtadhatu*) statue of Lakshana Devi. It is not easy to describe the facade of the temple; for the snow and rain of thirteen centuries have utterly corroded even the resistant deodar wood, so that only the stronger fibres of the carved surface remain. Thus, from some distance the figures, deeply craved, appear quite distinct, but if one approaches in order to study the details, the definition becomes more and more indistinct. For an exact explanation of Indian religious images the identification of their costumes, hair style, crowns and various emblems is necessary, but only an approximate explanation of the decoration is now possible.

In its general layout the temple entrance follows the average pattern of the later Gupta temple, such as, in the Himalaya, still survives in the, much later, wooden temples of Kulu. It consists of a sequence of alternating ornamental and figural frames, successive receding from the enclosing wall to the deep niches of the door proper. The first frame, slightly projecting from the enclosing rubble wall, is a semicircular moulding carved with rich floral scroll work. Near the upper corners, where the Jambs of the entrance turn into the lintel, it projects to the right and left, in order to offer room to two-winged lions. These lions are treated in a heraldic manner, so that their sitting figures rise to a height almost four times the breadth of their basis. The next frame consists of two jambs covered with figures and of a lintel of flying godlings. On each side there are four deities, each standing on its own pedestal, and at the bottom a kneeling *yaksha* supporting, with his arms, the whole door jamb. The figures are so deeply carved that they seem to be almost separate sculptures placed in front of the back ground; but unfortunately they are so badly damaged that they can no more be recognized. The deities of the lintel apparently are *gandharvas*, five couples on each side, each *gandharva* holding musical instruments in

his hands and carrying his mate, with some sacrificial gifts in her hands, on his back. Only the central figures hold what seems to be a feathered crown. The next frame is again a rounded moulding of vegetative scrolls from which, in the centre of the lintel, emerges a *kirtimukha* mask. Then follows another frame consisting of four standing figures on each side, and of a supporting *yaksha* at the bottom. Hutchison found them difficult to identify owing to their decayed state but Dr. Goetz thinks that though these figures are of somewhat smaller size, some of them can still be identified, "for, being deeper in the recess of the entrance, they have been less exposed to the weather." The two statuettes at the bottom represent the goddesses of the holy rivers; Ganga, standing on a *makara*, to the left and Yamuna (Jumna) on a tortoise, to the right each holding a water vessel and a lotus stalk. Both are attended by a small maid-servant who originally must have held a parasol. Of the other figures one seems to represent a three-headed Shiva, another Vishnu with human, boar and lion head, and a third possibly *Surya*. On the lintel four couples of flying godlings carry garlands to a central flower (*padma*), possibly a symbol of the mistress of the shrine. The innermost broad and flat frame consists of highly stylized leaf scrolls arranged in oblong medallions formed by the long stalk from which these scrolls branch off. In order to relieve this beautiful entrance from the pressure of the pediment, the latter has been mounted on a long beam anchored in the rubble wall on both sides. It likewise is a very heavy piece, rising in three storeys. The seven crouching figures along the basis of the triangle probably represent the seven days of the week. Here as well as on the architraves between the pediment and the doorway, we find an arrangement frequent in the Graeco Buddhist art of Gandhara; rows of figures in arched niches, separated by dwarf pilasters. In the lowermost row the figures are amatory couples which can be traced back to Graeco-Buddhist examples. We notice also a row of supporting crouching figures frequently met with in Gandhara sculpture and corresponding to the Atlantes of classical art. The ornamentation on the lintels and jambs of the doorway is of a purely Indian type. The lowermost storey consists

of ten miniature niches of round arches supported by short pilasters with pot-and-foilage capitals. And in each niche there stands a couple of lovers (*mithun*), each in a different attitude of wooing, embracing or kissing. The second storey has a similar number of niches, but without arches. These niches are framed by eleven dancing caryatids, standing on consoles projecting above the pillars of the preceding storey and again holding the brackets supporting the top storey. And in each there sits some godling in a miniature chapel with a three-fold roof. This last storey resembles, to some degree, that at the bottom, but the columns are lower, the arches depressed, and the niches are occupied by squatting figures with human or animal heads (*ganas*). The projecting cornices of the last two storeys are decorated with a frieze of suspended knobs (*opali*), a motif found also in other hill temples.

On this pediment rests the gable, a triangular panel enclosing a trefoiled niche in which an impressive deity is seated. This gable is supported by a frieze of nine deities sitting, with crossed legs, in very low arched niches. Apparently these are the *navagraha* (nine planets). The other two sides of the triangle are ornamented with a rounded cornice moulding of highly stylized scales or leaves. In the arch Vishnu is sitting, held up by his *vahana garuda*, while on both sides two rather distorted *chamara* (fly whisk) bearers are standing. *Garuda*, with very short legs and almost prostrate, is quite inconspicuous, hardly more than a variant of the *vakshas* on the pediment. Vishnu, with three faces (boar, human and lion) amidst a mass of ringlets, once had twelve arms holding in their hands the symbols of his power, though now many of them are broken. Of his right arms the uppermost holds a parasol, the second probably a mace or a lotus flower, the third an arrow, the fourth rests on the attendant, while the last two are lost; of his left arms the uppermost carries a lotus, or trident, the second a disk, the third a bow, the fourth rests on the other attendant, the two lower most are likewise broken. The whole gable triangle, however, is again framed by two richly carved cornice boards. Finally, attention may be drawn to the winged dragons rampant which adorn the upper corners of the doorway.

The interior of the temple is much simpler. The pillars (thamb, sanskrit *stambha*) of the *mandapa* are plain quadrangular wooden posts up to about two-thirds of their height. Then a broad and two small ringbands decorated with *kirtimukha* masks, flowers and string-courses, then a capping covered with lotus petals, and at last a simple pot-and-foliage capital and flower decorated abacus follow. The *sridhara* brackets above are decorated with a central piece (on top of the capital) representing some Hindu god with his *vahana* sitting in a niche formed by two miniature columns and a round arch rising from the snouts of two *makaras*. The lateral pieces, only slightly rounded off at the lower edge of the end, have reliefs of flying minor deities, and, on the level of the arch, a decorative frieze ending in a scroll. The ceiling is of the lantern type so common in India. By covering each corner with a triangular slab extending from the centre of one side to that of the next, the square of the ceiling is reduced to a smaller diagonally placed square; which is again reduced by the same procedure until the central opening has become small enough to be covered with a single slab. These slabs are all richly carved with ornaments, geometrical borders along the edges, and flower, *kirtimukha* and *makara* motifs in the centre of the triangles. The central slab finally is filled by an immense lotus rosette, the various rows of petals of which are partly treated in a naturalistic manner, partly dissolve into various other ornaments.

The entrance to the inner sanctuary repeats the decoration of the exterior entrance in a much simplified form. There are no figures except the lions in the upper corners of the here-much broader, round moulding. This moulding is covered with a scale pattern, at a few points interrupted by square panels decorated with rosettes. The rather narrow second and the very broad last, innermost frieze have a rich, but very uniform decoration of leaf scrolls, which in this case is not divided into medallions by the spirals of a connecting stalk.

The object of worship is a fine brass statue; three feet four inches high, on a pedestal of nine inches in height. Lakshana Devi (Bhagvati) is an aspect of Durga, also called Bhadrakhali in the *Bansauli*. Today this name is interpreted

as referring to Bhadrakali of Basohli. This seems to be a comparatively modern association, as Basohli was founded only in the early seventeenth century. Its predecessor Balaur, ancient Vallapura, is not known before the high middle ages, and even the temple of Malla Devi (an aspect of the Sarada Devi of Kashmir) at Sukral, the great centre of pilgrimage in the former Basohli State, is of the Muslim period. The only old Kali temple there is not at Balaur, but at Babor (ancient Babba-pura) between Jammu and Ramnagar-Bandhralta, which, however, is not earlier than the late ninth or early tenth century. Moreover, Bhadrakali is venerated in more places in the Punjab Himalaya, and is, in her turn, identified with Jvalamukhi or Jalpadevi, the great goddess of the Kangra Valley. But of the cult of Jvalamukhi we have no historical evidence earlier than the age of Mahmud of Ghazni (early eleventh century), though, of course, the local priestly tradition claims for it a hoary antiquity. Although the latter is highly probable, the cult seems long to have been of no more than local importance. Thus Lakshana Devi of Brahmaur surely cannot be a derivative of the cults either of Basohli-Vallapura or of Babor or of Jvalamukhi, but must in reality have its oldest known centre in the Punjab Himalaya. The dedicatory inscription on the image says that "the illustrious lord Meru Varman has caused the holy image of the goddess Lakshana to be made by the workman Gugga," in other words, it goes back to the second half of the seventh century.

As in most of the temples, the goddess is represented as Durga *Mahisha-mardini*, the slayer of the demon *Mahisha*, a form which we can trace first in the Udaygiri caves near Bhilsa (Malwa) and in the Gupta temple of Bhumara, but which became common under the Chalukyas of Badami and the early Rashtrakutas. As a matter of fact the Brahmaur image also follows the iconographic concept of the high Chalukya period (the seventh century). i.e. the goddess puts her right foot on the head of the killed buffalo demon, after having run her trident into its neck, while with her left hand she catches the buffalo's tail and lifts its whole body up almost vertically. In every other respect, however, the Brahmaur image belongs to late Gupta art, in the proportions of the figure, the anatomo-

mical treatment, the hair style, the costume, ornaments and emblems. The goddess wears a high *jatamukuta* (crown of matted hair), or rather an immense wig, the hair being piled up in a slightly oblique protuberance bound together by strings of pearls and various pieces of jewellery, thence to fall down on the shoulders and neck in innumerable ringlets. A similar costly belt with attached pearl strings and pendants, and a sort of pearl-studded girdle pressings in the belly, hold a skirt of very fine muslin. A diaphanous shawl falls down from the shoulders in innumerable fine, folds, and a necklace of golden disks hanging from a string of pearls, embossed bracelets from which dangle short strings of pearls and jewels, wristlets and anklets, complete the costume. The eyes of the goddess are inlaid with silver, and her four arms hold, in the upper right hand, a trident (*trisula*), in the lower right a sword (*khadga*), in the upper left hand a bell (*ghanta*) and in the lower left the tail of the buffalo demon.

Shakti Devi temple at Chitrari—Very similar to the Lakshana Devi temple at Brahmaur is that of Shakti Devi at Chitrari. It belongs to the same period as that of Lakshana, and, is a good specimen of the general pattern of hill shrines described above. Chitrari is a village in Piu *illaga*, lying in a fertile upland on the slope south of the Ravi, two-third of the way from Chamba upto Brahmaur, not far below the junction of the Budhil and Tundah nullas with the Ravi. The village is inhabited by Brahmins and musicians connected with the temple and with the great *mela* celebrated in the month of *Bhadon* when dancing goes on day and night, after the idol of the Devi has been bathed in water brought by runners from the Mani Mahes lake beyond Brahmaur. The Chitrari temple is regarded as one of the most holy sanctuaries of the hills, competing with those of Lakshana Devi at Brahmaur and of Bhavani at Kangra. And certainly it is one of the oldest. Tradition attributes its foundation to Mushuna, the legendary ancestor of the old Brahmaur dynasty. But the inscription on the idol mentions Meru Varman, the founder of Brahmaur, and another tradition says that the temple was the last work of Gugga, the master-artisan of Meru Varman.

This statement is more or less borne out by archaeological evidence for the building resembles the Lakshana temple at Brahmaur in many respects. But there are a number of differences both in its plan and decoration. For it has no separate *mandapa*, but only one large shrine (sixteen feet one inch by sixteen feet one inch), which however, seems later to have been subdivided into a cella and a *mandapa*. This nucleus is surrounded by an open gallery, i.e. a *pradakshina-patha* supported by twelve massive wooden columns. But the interstices between the columns have later been filled in with white-washed rude masonry of rubble blocks and clay strengthened by a number of horizontal beams. Instead, new wooden galleries have been constructed in front and on the right side. And the whole (thirty by twenty-nine feet) is covered by an almost flat pyramidal roof of well-cut slates.

Only the sanctuary proper and the, once open, gallery surrounding it belong to the original temple. The rubble masonry was last renewed after the earthquake of 1905, and old photographs show an almost flat gable roof in place of the present pyramidal one. The later wooden galleries have the elegant, but decadent forms of the eighteenth century, with columns in which medieval pot-and-foilage capitals, sixteenth century Rajput brackets and scaly Mughal pillar shafts in the style of Muhammad Shah have been blended into a quaint product of folk art.

As already mentioned, the original shrine is surrounded by a gallery (measuring inside twenty-four feet ten inches by twenty-five feet two inches, and, up to the lowest beam eight feet two inches high) supported by twelve heavy pillars (one foot six inches thick) of deodar wood, very similar to those of the Lakshana Devi temple at Brahmaur. But their decoration is somewhat richer and more elegant, the design more fluid and variegated, but also more mannered, and the individual motifs more interesting, though less numerous. In comparison with the Chitrari pillars those of Brahmaur look stiff, geometrical and almost clumsy. On the *sridhara* brackets lions and other animals alternate with flying *gandharvas*, and stylized flower scrolls with the deities of the central-niche

panels. On the exterior side, of course, these carvings, are very badly corroded by the weather, whereas the fringe of stalactite knobs (*opali*) along the edge of the roof must have been renewed in the course of time.

The entrance to the gallery and that to the interior shrine are both of the same type as those of Lakshana temple. Yet the rich pediment and gable of the facade of the latter are absent, while the sculptures of the door frames proper are less elaborate. The outer doorway, however, is evidently a later addition, and the coarse frescoes on the walls of the cella are of quite recent date. The exterior entrance is rather simple; first a small border, then a frieze of decorative bosses and finally a set of four, now badly damaged, deities on both sides. When the pillared gallery round the sanctum was still open, this frame must have stood, almost detached, also in the open. We can trace such arrangements in some later hill temples, though always in connection with a *mandapa* in front, but it is unknown in the rest of India, and possibly this exterior entrance, though an old piece, has been transferred from another, lost shrine. This seems plausible because there exists another ancient idol at Chitrari, likewise known as Shakti Devi, but actually the bust of a male deity. The door might thus have belonged to the vanished temple of this image.

The entrance to the sanctum is much more interesting. Along the door-jambs we find a double row of standing figures on each side of the entrance. Those of the two outer rows alternate with crouching animal-headed figurines, which act as Atlantes, and presumably are meant either for *rakshasas* or for *ganas* of Shiva. The outermost frieze projects to the right and left at the top corners, enclosing two sitting lions. The next frame consists of two jambs alternately decorated with three standing deities and three smaller crouching *ganas* (?) each. Of the latter two are ox-headed, two lion-headed, one has elephant ears and one a face on his belly. Among the deities Karttikeya, with six faces and a peacock, Indra with his *vajra* and the elephant Airavata, possibly also Shiva can be recognized on the left, and Brahma, four-armed and with a rosary and vessel in his hand, accompanied by two *hansas*,

on the right. The lintel again is decorated with flying *gandharvas*, those in the centre holding a crown, the rest various unidentified objects, each carrying his mate on his back. Here also we find, over the entrance, a row of flying figures four on each side the two in the centre carrying a crown, whereas the remaining six are accompanied by female figures each seated on the hip of its companion. Beneath these (flying figures) there is a row of thirteen cross-legged figures, of which nine represent the *navagrahas*, i.e. the sun, the moon, the five planets-Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus and Saturn, the eclipse-demon *Rahu* and the comet *Ketu*. *Rahu* is represented by a demon's head without a body, in agreement with the myth told in the *puranas*. It is said that *Rahu* stealthily partook of the nectar (*amrita*) produced by the churning of the ocean, but was betrayed by the sun and the moon, who had noticed the theft. He was beheaded by Vishnu, but the head had become immortal by the use of the nectar. Since then *Rahu's* head persecutes the Sun and the Moon and causes them to eclipse. The four remaining figures at the two ends possibly represent the guardians of the four regions (*lokapalas*). Among the standing figures we notice to the right the six-faced Karttikeya with his peacock, and Indra, the rain god holding a thunderbolt (*vajra*) and accompanied by his vehicle the elephant (Airavata); and to the left the four-armed Brahma, carrying a rosary and a water-pot and accompanied by a pair of geese. The inner rows consist each of four figures. On the left side we recognise Vishnu, three-faced, the side faces being a lion's and a boar's; and Durga slaying the buffalodemon (Mahishasura). The two lowermost figures are again Ganga and Yamuna, the personifications of the sacred rivers of India. In the upper corners of the doorway we notice the same winged dragons as are found on the Lakshana temple. The wooden pillars, with their pot-and-foilage capitals, supporting elaborately carved bracket-capitals in which couchant bulls and other animals have been introduced, deserve special notice. The corresponding lintel shows thirteen sitting figures, most of them four-armed and, as the tenth from the left, a big head in profile, with matted hair and well-executed ear-rings. This permits the group to be identified

as the *navagraha*, including *Rahu* the dragon demon causing the eclipse of the moon, and, on the right, the four *lakapalas*, the guardian deities of the four cardinal points. The innermost frame, finally, is decorated with highly stylized scroll-work sprouting from longdrawn creeper spirals growing out of the mouths of two sitting *yakshas* at the bottom.

The idol of Shakti Devi in the sanctum is a fine brass statue, with its socle four feet, six inches high. This copper socle is much lower than that of Lakshana, as the goddess stands on a big lotus, with reverted over-ripe petals, such as is a very common convention in Nepalese and Tibetan art. She has a very slim, elegant body covered only with a transparent skirt falling down to the ankles and forming some folds between the legs, held by a rich belt (*mekhala*) with a kind of girdle and strings of pearls of the same type as that worn by Lakshana Devi. Also the scarf hanging over her shoulders, her necklace, armlets, bracelets and ear-rings are of the same sort. But besides these, a long string of pearls hangs down from her neck between the heavy breasts to her thighs. And on her head she wears a high diadem, consisting of a golden circle decorated with two jewelled flowers above each ear, from which bands flow down, and a pile of five jewels above the forehead from which plummets emerge to the right, left and top. In her two right hands Shakti Devi holds a lance (*sakti*-a lance, but also power, energy) and a lotus (life), in her left hands a bell (aether, space) and a snake (death and time).

As already mentioned, another old idol exists at Chitrari, believed to represent Shakti Devi. It is likewise a fine old brass image, but only a bust from the waist upward emerging from the usual copper pedestal. It cannot be an image of the Devi, as it is a male figure, holding a lotus and a rosary in its hands. It wears a high *mukuta* of piled up hair, while long ringlets float down on the shoulders; a diadem is placed on the forehead, ending above the ears in two small flowers and rising above the temples in two high pinnacles. The eyes are inlaid with silver. Probably this bust represents the same deity as Balabhadra Varman's similar brass image at Harser near Brahmaur, *i.e.* Shiva. Its style is characteris-

tically Kashmiri, and stands very near to the *Surya* reliefs of Martand. It must, therefore, belong to the reign of Ajai Varman, or soon after.

Only slightly later we have to place two copper statuettes of *yoginis*, attendants of the great goddess. They are rather short, stout figures, with excessively short legs and small feet, a fat body and big head, and with two large staring eyes and an awkward smile. And yet they do not belong to primitive art; on the contrary, they are representatives, though degenerated and provincial, of a highly refined tradition. The treatment of anatomy and postures, the beautifully chiselled costume, the hair style, the jewellery diadems, the silver inlaid eyes, the oval halo, the type of the pedestal, all this places them still in the late Gupta tradition, and yet the stout roundness of the figures already has all the rural earthiness of early Pala and Pratihara art. Moreover, the excessively short legs, small feet, big heads are characteristic features of the dissolution of every late style; the artist still knows how to do every individual part, but has lost the sense of the whole, and accentuates the various parts of the figure according to their interest, naturally emphasizing the head and eyes as the centres of expression. We may, therefore, interpret these figures as products of the transitional style from Gupta to medieval art and may place them in the period of indirect Pala influence, via the dependent Ayudha kingdom of Kanauj, a vassal of which the Brahmaur State must have been in the years between the fall of the Kashmir empire of Lalita Ditya and the Tibetan (Kira) invasion. In this respect they are contemporaneous with the Pala bronzes which have repeatedly been found in Kulu.

Mrikula Devi temple at Lahul :—The temple of Kali, commonly called Mrikula Devi from the name of the village where it is found, is of unknown age. Margul or Marul, ancient Mrikula, is a village in Chamba-Lahul, at the junction of the Miyar Nala with the Chander Bhaga. About 1695 it was renamed Udaipur, when Raja Udai Singh (1690-1720) raised it to the status of a district centre in the part of Lahul which his father Chatar (or Satru) Singh (1664-1690) had annexed to the Chamba state. The place is not of much

interest, except for its unique temple of Kali, called Mrikula Devi after the name of the village. The popular tradition that the Mrikula temple and the temple of Hidimba at Manali in Kulu were wrought by the same artisan deserves no credit. The Manali temple with its profuse but crude wood-carvings was built by order of Bahadur Singh of Kulu in A.D. 1559. The temple of Mrikula Devi must be centuries older. It evidently belongs to some intermediate period, perhaps the tenth or eleventh century. The wood-carving of these hills exhibits, perhaps more than any other branch of Indian art, a constant deterioration. Modern work is indeed so clumsy as to appear primitive. The Mrikula temple, like that of Lakshana Devi, has an anteroom or *mandapa* in front of the shrine proper, and a solid wall enclosing both. Like the shrines already discussed, it does not look impressive from outside, as its exterior shell, exposed to all the inclemencies of a climate hardly better than that of the Tibetan highlands, had to be renewed time and again. It stands on a mountain slope, the usual structure of rubble filled in between wooden refters (thirty-three by twenty-three feet inside; twelve feet high), on the south side resting on a platform (six feet seven inches high), on the north side almost dug into the hill, as the interval between the wall and the hill has been filled up with stones and earth probably in order to reduce the danger from snow pressure and avalanches. In its western half there is the sanctuary proper, a cella (ten feet four inches by ten feet six inches outside) detached from the enclosing wall by a circumambulation passage; the eastern half is occupied by a *mandapa* with a broad balcony window on the south side and a ceiling supported by six pillars. The entrance is on the east side. The whole temple is covered with a steep gable roof (seventeen feet high) of shingles, which over the sanctuary proper rises to a height of forty-five feet above the ground in a steep pyramid (twenty-six feet five inches high), resembling the *shikhara* of Hindu temples in the plains. Curiously enough, all the roofs are symmetrically constructed, leaning over to the north, perhaps in order to increase the capacity of resistance to possible avalanches.

The interior, however, presents one of the most extraordinary views. The richness and interest of the carvings exceed the monuments of both, Brahmaur and Chitrari, though the artistic quality cannot compare with them. Even a first survey reveals that the deodar wood carvings do not all belong to the same period, but may be roughly divided into an earlier and a later group. The first comprises the facade of the shrine, the ceiling panels of the *mandapa* and the four main pillars supporting that ceiling. To the latter must be reckoned the panels on both sides of the window, the architraves of the ceiling, two additional pillars on the west side, opposite the sanctum, and the two huge *dvarapala* (*bhairava*) statues (six feet four inches high) flanking the facade of the sanctum.

"The facade of the Mrikula Devi shrine is the richest and most intricate of all those we have discussed. The outermost set of door-jambs is each divided into three-arched niches of varying type. Those at the bottom (supported by miniature *yakshas* between two lions) have a complicated gable of late Kashmiri type, with a centre-piece like the pinnacle of a *stupa* or temple and with peacocks in the corners and *kimaras* above the gable ends. In these very elongated niches (three feet six inches) Ganga stands on the left side on her *makara*, holding in her four hands a vessel, rosary, book and a long lotus stalk, and on the right side Yamuna on her tortoise, with similar emblems in her four hands. The next set of niches is much smaller (one foot ten inches high) and ends in big *kirtimukha* masks evolving from the foliage of the arches. That on the left encloses a standing four-armed figure holding a lance, lotus and water-vessel, whereas one hand rests on the hip. The figure in the right niche is its exact counterpart, although with many small differentiations. The top niches ending in foliage scrolls are again somewhat lower (one foot eight inches high) and enclosed rather stout, likewise four-armed figures, the one on the left side holding a trident, rosary, mirror and a fruit (*sitaphala*-custard apple) and the other a *makara*-staff, a skull-bowl, a skull-staff and a symbol now lost. It deserves notice that these two figures have the same emblems as the

satellites flanking the dancing Shiva and Parvati on the western panel of the ceiling. Next comes a frieze composed of flowers strung up in an Indian wreath, then another border with flame or lotus-petal design.

The next set of door-jambs, naturally much smaller, consists of five niches on each side, four ending in scroll-work arches, the topmost in a horizontal lintel on which a broad capital of Roman-Kashmiri type rests. In these niches the ten *avtaras* of Vishnu are arranged, on the left (from bottom upwards) Matsya (fish) Nar Singh (four-armed); Vamana with staff and parasol; Krishna as Vishnu with lion, human and boar head, and four arms holding the usual attributes; and at the top, Buddha in *blhumisparsa-mudra*; on the right *kurma* (tortoise); *varaha* boar-headed and four-armed; Parasu Rama, with battle-axe and *yajnopavita*; Rama, with bow and arrow; and, on top, Kalki on horseback, a battle-axe in his right hand. There follows another richly carved, round moulding and a frieze decorated with a winding creeper. The inner jambs, likewise ending in late Kashmiri capitals, are divided by flower-scrolls into four medallions, each framing the figure of a dancing *apsara*. Finally a frieze of scroll-work frames the door of the sanctuary proper.

The lintel, capped by the ornamented mouldings next to the extreme door-jambs, connects the highest niches and capitals of the middle set of jambs. It consists of five miniature chapels separated by a screen of short pillars dissolving into plaitwork ornaments (or interlaced snakes?). Each chapel consists of an image niche enclosed by a depressed arch resting on two slim fluted columns, while on the crown of the arch a *kalasa* ending in a high pinnacle stands; this niche again is covered by a towering gable, either of the Kashmiri type; *i.e.* two superposed capped triangles, with a bird in each of the lateral corners, and an *amalaka* on top; or of a more archaic type, a central ogival vault resting on two short pillars, and two lateral half-vaults, *i.e.* the front of an early Buddhist *chaitya*-hall. In the niches five deities are seated, cross-legged (from left to right): (1) a crowned four-armed god on a lion, holding a staff and rosary, vessel,

and hand in *abhayamudra*; (2) a similar deity, but with attributes inverted; (3) a crowned four-armed god sitting on *garuda*, holding arrow and trident, vessel and battle-axe; (4) a figure without crown, big head, protruding eyes and grinning mouth, sitting on a lion holding staff and sword, trident and shield (possibly *Rahu*) (5) a crowned, two-armed god sitting on a prostrate *yaksha*, one hand holding a staff, the other in *tarjani-mudra* (threatening). The chapel gables project from a frieze of *hansas* (geese) carrying a long pearl string in their beaks; this frieze is continued over the capitals of the middle jambs.

The lower lintel, resting on the capitals of the innermost door-jambs, consists of three similar, but somewhat bigger chapels, connected by decorative dwarf pillars either dissolving into plaitwork, or consisting of coupled slim columns connected by a diaper covering the whole length and breadth of the shaft. The crowned, four-armed deity sitting cross-legged, on a ram, in the left chapel, holds two tridents, a sceptre and a water vessel; the central one, over seven rearing horses, is the sun-god *Surya*, holding a sceptre and a vessel; the crowned figure in the right chapel again sits on a lion, holding sword and sceptre, shield and water vessel in its four hands. Dr. Vogel identifies the deities in the eight chapels with the group of *grahas*, regularly placed over the entrance of Hindu temples, although their usual number is nine.

Brindavan C. Bhattacharya's, *Indian Images*, 1921, pp. 31 supplies valuable information on the iconography of the nine planets derived from *Hemadri*, *Vishnudharmottara* and *Matsyapurana*. This enables us to identify most of the figures in the eight chapels. The deity in the centre of the upper row must be *Budha* (Mercury) who is stated to be similar to Vishnu. The two on his left side may be safely identified with the demons *Rahu* and *Ketu*. The first figure of the second row is *Mangalabhauma* (Mars), who according to the *Matsyapurana* is similar to *agni*; his *vahana* being a ram and his weapons a lance and a trident. As it is very improbable that *Surya* and *Chandra*, the two principal members of the group, have been omitted and the separate

figure tower the doorway, whose hands are broken, appears to be the solar deity, we may perhaps assume that the person immediately above him represents *Chandra*, though not in his orthodox appearance. The identity of the three remaining *grahas* is also uncertain, but *Brihaspati* (Jupiter), who is stated to resemble *Brahma*, may perhaps be recognized in the first figure of the upper row on account of his attributes. In his neighbour, who has the same attributes (a gourd (*kamandalu*), a rosary (*akshamala*) and a staff) it is tempting to see *Sukra* (Venus) who is the *purohita* of the *asuras*. If this is correct, it follows that the deity to the right of the supposed *Chandra* must be *Sanaischara*. The *sloka* regarding *Rahu* quoted by Bhattarcharya from *Hemadri*, *rambalam pustakam karyam bhujanaikena samyutam* would seem to be corrupt, and might instead be, *kevalam mastakam karyam bhujanaikena samyutam*.

Beneath this lintel is another frieze of five single figures projecting from the ornamental friezes between the capitals of the innermost door-jambs and round the cella door. The prominent central carving again represents the sungod on his chariot drawn by seven horses. The others show *gandharvas*, playing cymbals, bow-harp and staff-cithara, and must be regarded as the musicians accompanying the dance of the *ap-sarases* in the panels of the adjoining door-jambs.

The idol of *Kali*, in her aspect as *Mahishamardini*, probably is contemporary with the later wood-carvings on the architraves and window panels, but of a very different type. An inscription in late *Sharada* characters on the pedestal states that it was cast by one *Panjamanaka Jinaka* from *Bhadrawah* in the *Sastra* ? year 4645—A.D.—1569-70 (according to Dr. Hermann Goetz) and dedicated by *Thakur Himapala*. According to Dr. Hutchison the inscription shows it to belong to a late period perhaps to the thirteenth or fourteenth century. It is a rather primitive and clumsy work, despite its elaborate character. For the goddess is represented eight-armed, standing on the defeated buffalo-demon whom her threefold lion attacks from behind. To the right stands a small figure of the donor, a caricature of similar statuettes in *Rajasthan*. But the bodies of the goddess and of the buffalo look bloated, notwithstanding the thin legs and arms. *Kali's* head is much too big, and her

mukuta looks rather like the ceremonial crown of a Tibetan lama, her girdle like that of a Lamaistic terrible deity. The enclosing frame suggests brass idols of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries from Rajasthan, the top of it the backs of early Mughal thrones. The influence of Mughal and Rajput art is not surprising in the sixteenth century; it penetrated probably via Balaur which then had some control over Bhadrawah; the Tibetan element is understandable in a frontier area where the Tibetan Lahulis venerate Mrikula Devi as *rDo-rje-phag-mo* (Sanskrit *Vajravahni*).

“*Chamunda temple at Devi Kothi*—Of the other numberless village temples, mostly dedicated to Devi or Naga, the only one which deserves a passing notice is that of Chamunda, at Devi Kothi, on account of the Mughal influence manifest in its wood-carvings. It was built by Raja Umed Singh, A.D. 1754. The same influence is observable in some profane buildings of that period, e.g. the State Kothi at Brahmaur ascribed to Raja Prithi Singh, which was destroyed in the earthquake of the fourth April, 1905. Specimens of modern wood-carvings, as far removed from the old work in merit as in time, may be seen at Mindal, opposite Sach, on the temple of Chamunda (commonly called Mindal Devi) and on the little Naga temple near Kilar.”*

The splendid temples and the antiquities in Chamba district could not have been possible but for some of the enlightened and religious rulers of Chamba. Chamba State was also lucky that it did not face the problem of a ruthless destruction by invaders or internal disruption. The brazen idols of Meru Varman nearly contemporaneous with the temple of Martand in Kashmir still stand in their ancient shrines of carved cedar wood. Some of the original copper-plate grants of the rulers are still preserved and produced by the descendants of the original donees. Like *Rajatarangini* in Kashmir Chamba State has its *Vansavali* which preserves a fair account of the rulers in a chronological order. Raja Meru Varman flourished near about A.D. 700. The earlier king Maru Varman could be described as the historical predecessor of Meru

* *District Gazetteer of Chamba* (Revised) by Thakur Sen Negi, (1963).

Varman and he founded the town of Brahmapura and made it the capital of the new State. Meru Varman extended the limits of the State by conquests. The inscription of Meru Varman at Chatrari dedicated the idol of Shakti Devi in gratitude for his conquests. Meru Varman had extended his sway to Kulu State as well as another inscription recorded by a feudatory of Meru Varman, named Ashadha at Gun village shows. We have earlier referred to the temples erected by Meru Varman which makes him a great builder. There is a long inscription on the pedestal of the brazen Nandi bull in front of the Mani Mahesa temple. This and the two other inscriptions in the temple of Lakshana Devi and Ganesa ascribe the dedication of the idols to King Meru Varman. The temple known as Suraj-Mukha shrine contained the patron deity of Chamba Raja. This temple was also built by Meru Varman and the deity installed.

Mushan Varman (A. D. 820) the posthumous son of Lakshmi Varman commemorated by the mouse story does not appear to have left any standing monument. But a later king Sahila Varman, referred to earlier founded the new capital town of Chamba and shifted the capital there. The sacrifice of his daughter Champavati is commemorated by the Chamasni temple erected by the repentant but very affectionate father. The annual Suhi Mela commemorates Champavati when women assemble to sing her glory, devotion and sacrifice. The annual *mela* for about twentyone days from the 1st to the 21st *Baisakh* has made the temple more than a family temple for the ruling family. It is a temple extremely popular with the entire area. Sahila Varman as mentioned earlier erected quite a few more temples as well as the original palace at Chamba.

The rulers of Chamba along with the Hindu rulers of some other States are also to be remembered for their patronage of the artists who had expertise in wooden architecture and *Paharia-paintings* on the walls or roofs or separately. Apart from the paintings on the walls or ceilings of the temples we have a fairly large collection of old paintings, etc., on mythological and other subjects at the Bhuri Singh Museum. There are also portraits and miniature paintings. Some

of the rooms in the palaces have still wonderful decorations with oil paintings on the walls. Some of the private families also have specimens. It appears that when the artists had to leave Delhi, Agra and other places better known for art due to persecution of some of the Mughal Kings these smaller ruling princes in Himachal area gave them shelter and patronage. For our purposes only a mention to the wall paintings etc., as decorations on temples or other places is necessary as mostly the themes are old religious stories, mythological tales, *shikhar* and love dalliances of Lord Krishna, Radha and *gopinis* etc. (Raja Sanshar Chand was a great patron of the artists.).

A brief mention has to be made to the pilgrim centres which have become much more than a mere religious institution in the area.

Apart from the widescale observance of the religious festivities like *Lohri*, *Basowa*, *Shivratri* and *Diwali* both indoors, at friend's places, and at temples in the neighbourhood, we have in Chamba area some important pilgrim centres. On *Lohri* day *til* (sesame), rice and *gur* are offered to the fire and next morning with great mirth *khichri* (gruel of rice and *dal* with condiments and vegetables) are eaten. A bath is indispensable. On *Baisakhi* festival earthen pots filled with water are offered to the priests along with fruits and some money and a feast is held for the family. *Shivratri* is the day for observance of a religious fast and *puja* to Lord Siva. Food is taken only in the evening and mostly it is restricted to fruits and milk along with some sweets. The fast is known as a *brat*. Women observe *Shivratri* with greater zeal. *Diwali* is observed on two days when *Diyas* (small earthen lamps) are put out in a line or circle. On the first day the burning front of the wicks is turned inwards while on the second day the order is reversed.

Kunjar Mahadev located at pargana Tundi is an important pilgrim centre. The place is about one and half miles off the Chamba-Shahpur motorable road and the observance is done on the very day the *mela* at Mani Mahes takes place. Religious people who cannot go to offer *puja* of Lord Siva

at Mani Mahes lake usually visit Kunjar Mahadev and according to accepted legend earn the same *pun* (virtue) through the *darshan* of Lord Siva. There is a sacred well and people draw water from it and have their bath and offer homage at the *Shiv Pindi*.

Kali-ka-dull; — a lake dedicated to goddess Kali about 12 miles from Tisa at Chaurah tahsil is another important pilgrim centre. This place is also visited nearabout the same time when Mani Mahes Kailash is visited. The entire route upto the lake has to be covered on feet, and it is a very hazardous journey. There are some caves here and there which give shelter to the pilgrims in inclement weather. The object of undertaking the pilgrimage is to offer *sukhan* or *bandha* (homage on the fulfilment of a prayer) and physical hazards and hardships are cheerfully borne.

There are some religious *jatras* which are largely attended. The Devi Dehra near Bathri *jatra* lasts for eight days. The other similar week-long religious *jatras* are held at villages Banikhet, Nag Mandhor at Khatain and Nag Bintru at Gawani. The local deity is worshipped and the chief attraction is that the traditional *chela*, the chosen man of the deity gets possessed and talks and acts abnormally but answers to the questions of the pilgrims.

Some of the other local *jatras* are held at villages Baira, Barnota, and Hungiri. The *jatra* at Baira is held in the month of *Sawan*. People still talk of the man-eating leopard that used to infest this area. Goddess Kali was offered *puja* and promised a *jatra* if the menace could be removed. It is said after this promise the man-eater disappeared and the *jatra* came into existence.

Although the Hindus constitute about 91% of the population, we cannot ignore the religious practices of the people whose religious beliefs veer round demons, ancestors and nature's forces. Some of the original beliefs and traditions still persist in conventional Hindus and have inadvertently crept into orthodox Hindu religious practices.

Mother Earth is supposed to have a soul. Every village holding has a soul or spirit (*khetr Pal*) and that spirit has to

be propitiated because it is disturbed by ploughing of the tiller. Mother Earth is offered incense, or flowers or a goat or a sheep.* Usually a stone or a wooden post is ceremoniously set up in a corner of the field as the symbol. In the same way the mountains and their peaks have deities, good or bad. Stones are thrown in a heap or flags are fixed up at important tops and dangerous positions for the trekker. Large trees usually are believed to offer shelter to the *banbirs* or forest spirits. The *banbirs* are said to live in the pomegranate, lime, tuna, fig, *kainth*, *simal* and walnut trees. The *banbirs* are credited with the power to cause sickness or epidemics in men or cattle. These are believed to be female spirits who are regarded as the guardians of the cattle and have to be propitiated.

If soil, mountain and forests have their particular spirits it goes without saying that water should also have them. *Bir-batal* is the spirit of water and is believed to be living in every river and stream or large water sheet. The *Jaljogans* are also supposed to inhabit springs and streams. If a man and particularly a woman commits suicide in a stream, tank or river she will become a *jalgogan* and it is said when she feels lonely she drags a bather to death. Naturally some mountains in this region with forests and large water patches will have the *Nag* or the serpent as the presiding deity. The *Nag* cult is epitomised in Kelang Nag whose present temple is at Kulti village. The old Gazetteer mentions :

“Kalihar Nag, as was his original name, now better known as Kelang, came from British-Lahul. Fifteen or sixteen generations ago cattle disease was prevalent at Kugti, and the people of that village vowed to hold a fair, if it abated. Tradition says that Kelang, in the form of a serpent, rode on the horns of a ram from Lahul, and stopped at Dughi two miles from the present temple. Remaining there for three generations, he went to Darun at the source of a stream, a cold place difficult of access; so the people petitioned his *chela* to remove lower down,

* The author found this custom in Thailand also where *Bhumi-Puja* is quite common.

and the Nag, through his *chela*, told them to cast a *bhana* (a musical instrument like a plate of metal, which is struck with a stick) from that place, and to build a new temple at the spot where it stopped. By digging the foundations, they found a three-headed image of stone, and on removing it a stream gushed forth. This was many generations ago. This image is in the *padmasan* attitude. Raja Siri Singh presented a second image of eight metals (*ashtadhatu*), which stands upright, holding a *lathi* or pole in its right hand. Its head is covered with figures of serpents, and it wears a necklace of *chakras* with a *janeo* (sacred thread) and *toragi* or waistbelt and *paze* (loin-cloth), all of serpents. This temple is closed from first *Magh* to first *Baisakh*. At other times worship is performed every Sunday but only sheep and goats are accepted as offerings. The Kelang Nag has grown from being merely the Nag-deity of the Kugti village to the position of over-lordship as the presiding god of the entire Kugti valley and the Kugti pass. There is a strong belief prevalent there, to which some outsiders also bear testimony, that sportsmen going to Kugti side for big game, such as brown bear, must first propitiate the Kelang Devta with the sacrifice of a goat if they are to have a bag worth their while. When the Gaddi shepherds cross the Kugti pass over to Kulu-Lahul with their flocks for summer grazing, they dare not pass the temple, which lies on the path, without offering the sacrifice."



Gaurishankar Temple at Dashed.

KANGRA AREA

The previous district of Kangra in the old Punjab province has now been split into Kangra, Hamirpur, Una, Kulu and Lahul and Spiti districts. Lahul and Spiti together make one district. The District Gazetteer of Kangra published in 1924-25 describes the old undivided Kangra district as follows:

“This vast tract, comprising an area of 9,978 square miles, stretches eastwards from the plain country of the Bari and the Jullundur Doabs, over the Himalayan ranges, to the boundary of Tibet. It is bounded on the north-east by the Great Himalayan range, which forms the valley of the upper Indus and separates the district from the Tibetan region of Rupshu and the territories of the Chinese empire; on the south-east by the hill States of Bashahr, Mandi and Bilaspur; on the south-west by the district of Hoshiarpur; and on the north-west by the Chakki torrent which divides it from the hill portion of the Gurdaspur district, and by the native state of Chamba. It is divided into seven tahsils, of which five lie in Kangra proper and two in the Kulu sub-division : of the former three, Hamirpur, Dehra and Nurpur, lie along the south-western border of the district, where it adjoins the plains and the Siwaliks, while the Kangra and Palampur tahsils form the northern boundary and lie at the foot of the main range of the outer Himalayas, Palampur *tahsil* being connected by a narrow neck of mountainous country, called Bangahal, with the outlying tract that forms the Kulu sub-division. This last includes the two *tahsils* of Kulu and Plach or Saraj which, lying on the hither side of the mid-Himalayan range belong to India, and the outlying cantons of Lahul and Spiti, which, situated on the head waters of the Chenab and Sutlej systems, respectively, and between the mid and western Himalayas, belong rather to Tibet than to India.”*

There have been substantial changes almost in all spheres since besides the splitting into several districts. Yet

* *District Gazetteer of Kangra*, 1924-25 (page 1).

the following observations in the old Gazetteer are of considerable interest :—

“Kangra is one of the most densely populated districts in the Punjab. Other distinguishing features are the number of Hindus and the predominance of agriculturists—Kangra is more agricultural and more essentially Hindu than any other equal tract of country. Caste prejudices are consequently stronger here than elsewhere. The hill Brahmins will not as a rule associate with the same caste from the plains. The Rajputs will not allow low caste people of whom there are so many in the district to pass with beating drums in front of their houses. The high caste Rajputs will rather give up everything than compromise their honour by giving their daughters to families with a lower social status. There are castes here whose members cannot approach men of a higher caste lest their presence should profane them. There are barbers here who will not shave men of low castes who have to provide their own barbers or make their own arrangements. The marriage customs also show some novel features about them. There are three kinds of wives found in these hills, the *bihata*, the *rakhorar* and the *sarit*. The two latter will be stamped as concubines in the plains, but here the *rokhorar* at least ranks higher than a concubine. The married woman still retains her large nose ring which has almost disappeared from other districts of the Panjab.”*

“As soon as one enters the valley one is in an old world with its own problems with a beautiful scenery, with its old stone temples, slate-covered houses, roaring hill torrents, snow-peaked hills on one side, and a valley full of fertile lands below.”**

There were a number of States ruled by *Rajas* such as Kangra, Guler, Jaswan, Siba, Datarpur, Kutlehr, Nurpur and Bangahol-States. They have all merged in one or other districts of Himachal Province now. The district was created in 1847. The first headquarters of the district was at

* *District Gazetteer of Kangra*, 1924-25, p. 6-7.

** *Ibid*, p. 8.

Kot-Kangra. In 1855 this was shifted to Dharamshala and this was a picturesque hill station at that time.

The social customs have also had a sea-change. Polyandry in Saraj and Lahul which were included earlier in Kangra district has been referred to as follows :

“Polyandry is never practised in this part of the District, though it is practised in Saraj and Lahul. It is not uncommon however, for a man to sell his wife to any one else who makes a fair bid for her. Sometimes such agreements are executed on stamped paper and presented for registration. Polygamy is considered allowable, and is more or less practised among nearly all the tribes. The difficulty of procuring wives acts, however, as considerable check upon this practice.”*

In the recent gazetteers of Lahul and Spiti district and of Kinnaur district (1975) we find that polyandry still lingers and defended although it appears to be on the last legs. Obviously a lapse of fifty years is not enough to wipe out an ancient traditional social custom. The religious orders are still almost the same as described in the Gazetteer of 1924. The Ruling Houses as such have disappeared and the descendants have been forced to be commoners but still the respect for them subsists. Still the *Dussehra* at Kulu and other Raj headquarters continues and the prerogatives enjoyed by the Ruling Princes for ceremonies in connection with the *Pujah* are respected.

The following remarks about superstitions in the District Gazetteer of Kangra (1924) have still some force throughout the different districts into which Kangra district has been split :

“The hill people are very superstitious. They firmly believe in witchcraft, and one of their most constant reproaches against our rule is that there is no punishment for witches. Every incident at all out of the ordinary course, such as the death of a young man, or the cessation of milk in a buffalo is ascribed at once to supernatural causes. They will not set

* *District Gazetteer of Kangra*, 1924-25 (page 138).

out on the most common expedition nor undertake any duty without first consulting a Brahman. They have their lucky and unlucky months and days. Marriages are interdicted in *Poh*, *Chet*, *Bhadon* and *Asauj*, or four months in the year. Saturdays and Wednesdays are propitious days for going towards the south, Thursdays to the north, Sundays and Tuesdays to the east, and so on. The fourth and eighth day of the moon are full of disaster, and no one would begin an enterprise on these dates. The priestly class, again, have an even deeper influence here than in other parts of India. Besides the larger temples, the shrines of lesser divinities are innumerable and almost every house possesses its Penates in the shape of a *Sidh* or Nag, a deity which is supposed to repel witches and to propitiate fortune.”*

This background is indicated for an appreciation of the Pahadi culture reflected in the temples and the religious legends they are associated with. The vicissitudes of the political history, wars and battles, invasions and plunders have not had very much impact and the Pahadis continue their colourful life on the hills, valleys, slopes and plains. Their food habits have had some change but basically they continue as they existed fifty years back. Crops have multiplied, more irrigation, educational, transport, medical, agricultural finances etc. are available and the economic condition has definitely improved.

Kangra area being the back-bone of the Himachal Pradesh and holding the keys as it were we think it necessary to give this preliminary introduction.

* *District Gazetteer of Kangra*, 1924-25 (p. 200).

RELIGIOUS FAIRS IN KANGRA AREA

"A good many fairs are held in the District and on the occasion of most of these fairs wrestling matches take place and visitors from all parts of the hills flock in large numbers. A wrestling match is called a *chhinj* and the *chhinj* of Kangra near Dharmsala which takes place during the month of March attracts more spectators than those held at other places.

The chief festival of the people in these parts is the annual *Sair* which is observed on the first day of Asuj. During the early hours of the morning of that day the barber goes about with a basket in his hands. A *Galgal* is placed in it and as he goes about he announces the arrival of that auspicious day. Men, women and children bow to that fruit which is the emblem of the fruits of the harvest about to be reaped, and of the happy termination of the rains. All the members of the family meet on that day, the women appear in their best, and the best food is cooked and partaken of that day. This is the *bara din* of the hillmen and everybody tries to be among his family on that day. This day marks the departure of the rainy season and the people, so to say, thank God because the rains have gone leaving their houses and the crops uninjured. An insect called "*Tida*" skips about at that time of the year and the people say its peculiar sound is an announcement of the advent of the happy day. Its notes are said to mean "*Sair* has come, *Sair* has come."

Of the fairs held in the Nurpur tahsil that held at Tika Kohri in Bhadwar at a distance of about five miles from Nurpur is the most important. People go there to make their offering every Saturday and Tuesday, but the days of the fair are the four Saturdays of the month of *Sawan*. The *Pujaris* of the place who receive the offerings are the Thakurs of the Tika. It is commonly believed that if a person is bitten by a snake and he goes there he is cured. The fair is accordingly called *Nagani Mata* fair. It is said a woman gave

birth to a serpent here and a leper was cured of his leprosy. The Tika is, therefore, called Kohri.

The fair known as the Shiboo Sthan fair is held at Bhramaur at a distance of 12 miles from Nurpur. Its days are the four Sundays of the month of Sawan although in Har also visitors come from the neighbouring tahsils of Dasuya and Dehra. A visit to this place is also said to have the power to cure the person bitten by a snake.

The fair held at Sitla near Damtal is held on every Tuesday of *Chet* and attracts a large number of persons. The visitors seek shelter for the night in the temple at Damtal whose *mahant* receives offerings.

The most important fair in the district is that held at Jwalamukhi in Dehra tahsil. Hindus from all parts of the province and even parts of other provinces come here in large numbers in April and October during what are called the "*Nauratra* days of the Durga goddess."

"The fair held at Pirsaluhi, Mauza Kaloha, in Dehra Tahsil is also well known. It takes place on the 7th of Magh, the visitors spend the night in the open and fire is lighted in numerous places as the nights are cold. Many men do not use the milk and *Ghi* of their buffaloes and cows till an offering thereof has been made to the shrine and the offerings thus collected are distributed amongst the Rajputs, *fakirs* and *bharais* there. The shares of those who receive these offerings are often sold and mortgaged by the persons concerned.

The Narihana fair in this Tahsil is held in the month of June six or seven days before the Nirjala Ekadashi and a big crowd assembles there. Goats are slaughtered and other offerings are made to the Shiv God there and a wrestling match adds to the attraction of the fair."

"Of the fairs held in Palampur Tahsil the one held at Bhawarna and known as Bhikhe Shah fair is the most important. Bhikhe Shah was a Rajput and he was the *chela* of a Musalman *fakir* called Shah Mustali. One day, so runs the legend, they were going together and a dead body was being carried there. The Musalman said they were carrying a

dead body but the *chela* said that it was a living person. The *fakir* asked how could he say that the man was alive. Thereupon he took off the winding sheet of the corpse and sprinkled water over the face. Life was restored, Shah Mustali felt ashamed, Bhikha ran away in fear of the Guru and it is said he vanished at this spot. A tomb and a mosque were raised there since he was the *chela* of a Musalman and a fair is held there every year in June. Cattle are also brought here and are sold.

The Balakrupi fair in this Tahsil is held in the months of Jeth and Har. There is a temple of Siva here and offerings of grain and other things are made here. Some people bring the first hair of their children to this place, present it to the god; and night vigils are kept by many to earn religious merit.

At Baijnath two fairs are held one in March and the other in January.

The Saloh fair takes place in August, some giving out that they are possessed go on shaking their head for hours and the people think it is due to the influence of the goddess. The managers of this temple are Ghirths who receive the offerings.

The Asapuri fair is held round the temple on the high hill in the month of August. An important wrestling match takes place at Saliana at a distance of six miles from Palampur. At Kangra two fairs are held like those of Jwalamukhi during the Durga weeks in October and April. Visitors from all parts of the country come and pay their homage at the ancient temple of the goddess. The old temple with its golden domes and spire was demolished by the terrible earthquake of 1905 but the image of the goddess was left intact. A new temple has been raised again and the fairs are held regularly.

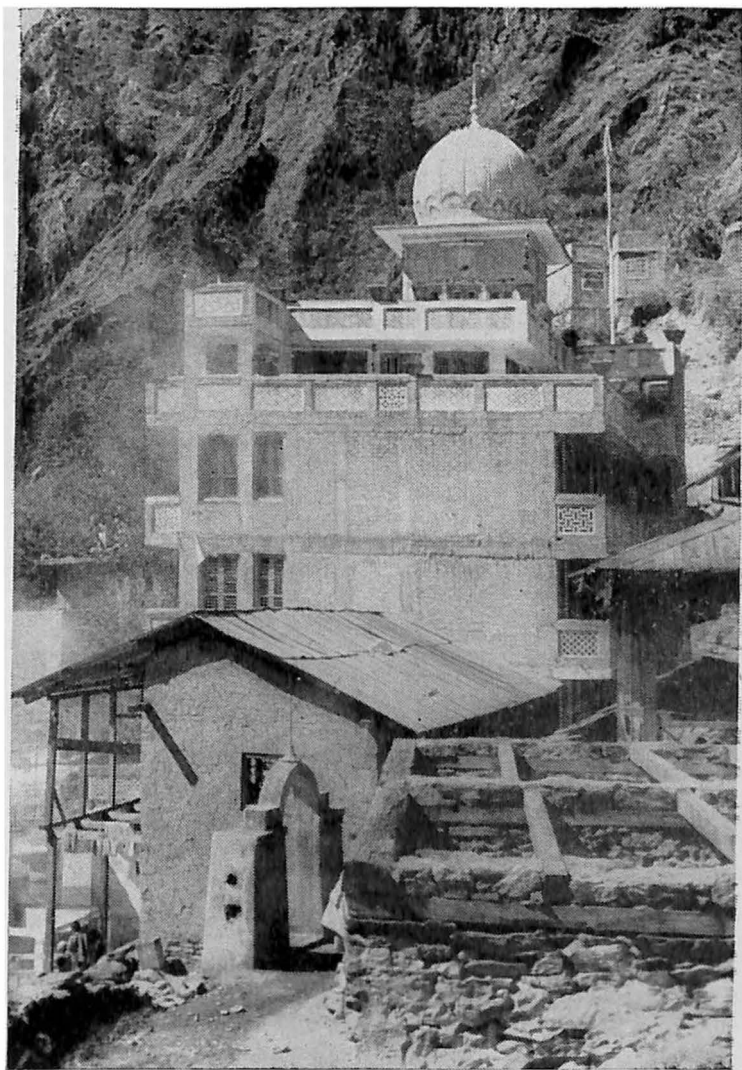
At Ranital 11 miles from Kangra there is the tomb of a Hindu *fakir* named Bawa Fattu. It is said he possessed the power of granting the wish of all those that approached him. A fair is held there on the Bisakhi day.

"An other well-known fair in this Tahsil is that held at Nerti about one mile from the main road to Palampur.

This is the place where a fight took place between the Raja of Chamba and the Katoch Raja of the Kangra State. The former was killed treacherously and it is according to his dying wish that a fair is held there. People say and believe that he went on fighting even after his head had been severed from his body. Gaddis of the high hills flock there in large numbers and in addition to cattle woollen blankets are sold there. The temple at which the fair is held is now managed by the Raja of Chamba. A *muafi* is also attached to this temple. The fair takes place on the 7th of Har every year.

The Dal fair held at a place in upper Dharmsala during the month of August or September attracts a large number of men and women throughout the District. The Girths and Gurkhas specially are fond of attending this fair and Girth women sing songs as they go to and come from this place.”*

* *District Gazetteer of Kangra* (1924-25) page, 222-226.



Manikaran Temple in Kulu District (Courtesy: H. P. Govt.).

THE LEGEND OF MANI KARAN*

In the wanderings of Lord Siva and Goddess Parvati in the forests of the Himalayan ranges, they came to a place now called MANI KARAN. The mountain-locked area, the lush green patches and the forests charmed them and they decided to stay there for sometime.

For long eleven hundred years they remained at this place. At one time, when the Lord was relaxing with the Goddess, in the beautiful waters of a stream running by the side, the '*MANI*' (Jewel) in a ear-ring of the goddess dropped somewhere.

Parvati was much distressed and there was a thorough search but efforts to find out the jewel failed. Lastly, the Lord ordered his attendants, to trace out the jewel, wherever it may be. That was also unsuccessful. Lord Siva got enraged, as a result of which his third eye opened. With the opening of the third eye of the Lord Siva, a very ominous event, there was a great commotion all over the universe. The entire universe was much too upset and apprehended a great calamity.

Shesh Nag, the serpent god, was approached. In order to subside the anger of Lord Siva Shesh Nag hissed and hissed and there was a flow of boiling water passing over the area and out came a number of precious stones of the type which was lost. Lord Siva was pacified.

The water still continues to be hot. Before the earthquake of 1905 affecting this area also, it is said, that this boiling water used to rise, to about ten feet height.

There are several temples in the Mani Karan village. The most important is that of Lord Raghunath. The *Pandas* (priests) of the village claim that the idol of Rama was brought

* In later administrative re-organisation Mani Karan complex has gone to Kulu district now. But as Kangra people devotedly even now treat Mani Karan to be in Kangra the description has been given here.

from Ayodhya and installed in this temple by the Raja of Kulu. This lacks a historic confirmation. There was also an idol of Lakshman the younger brother of Lord Rama Chandra. This has now disappeared. On the left hand side of the Lord is the idol of goddess Sita.

The temple is very old and on one of the stones in its wall, the history of the temple is written which is not legible.

There is another very old temple of Lord Siva which got tilted during the earthquake of 1905. The great prestige with which Mani Karan is held is seen by the fact that the *Devatas* of Kulu valley pay regular visits to Mani Karan. The followers of the individual deities at different places are carried ceremoniously in a procession to Mani Karan on specified auspicious days.

The visiting deities are given a ceremonial bath. The second chapter of *Brahm Puran* recites the story of Mani Karan as given above. The place is described as one of hot and cold waters and the divine pair had repaired there for water sports (Jal-Krida). Fragrant and attractive flowers graced the place and by a bath at the *Sangam* (confluence) one is eternally blessed. The *Brahm-Puran* enjoins the pilgrims pass a night awake at Mani Karan and do *puja* (*Raat-Jagran*). Thereby the pilgrims obtain the full virtue of the world. The story of the loss of the jewel and the frantic search and ultimate recovery is vividly described. The tract is Lord Siva's own and a pilgrimage at this place is adequate and one need not visit Kashi (Varanasi) and other places of pilgrimage.

The place is also held sacred by the Sikhs. The *Janam Sakhi* (*Twarikh Guru Khalsa*) by Giani Gian Singh mentions about the visit of Guru Nanak Dev to this place. It has been mentioned that accompanied by his disciple Bhai Mardana the Guru reached Jwalamukhi temple after visiting Kalanaur, Gurdaspur, Dasuya, Triloknath, Palampur and Kangra. The Guru then proceeded towards Mandi and after visiting Chamba and Kulu he came to Bijli Mahadev. At all these places Guru Nanak Dev had preached. Then he came to Mani Karan. The *Janam Sakhi* (Autobiography of Bhai Mardana) mentions the miracles did by the Guru.

The Guru came to Mani Karan along with his Five *Piaras* (followers).

On examination it is understood the Mani Karan hot spring is said to have got Uranium and other radio active minerals.

Brahm Puran mentions :

“On the western side, there are tanks of hot and cold waters called *Vishnu Kund*. They are capable of showering generosity. By having a bath in these tanks, the human beings go to the Heaven (*Vishnu Lok*). The eastern side of the area was created by Lord *Brahma* in the ancient times. It is famous for a river called *Brahma Neel*. By taking a bath in this river, all evils of the human beings vanish. One who does not worship here, never feels at rest. One month, seven days or even three days bath, in the *Vishnu Kund* is sufficient to attain salvation. There is no doubt about that, anybody who dies, in any corner of this area, gets released from the worldly bondage. On the northern side, there is a mountain which is named as *Harinder*. Merely a look at this mountain will make a person free from all evils and on the south is the *Parvati River* which everybody.

By taking bath here and by drinking water of the place, people go to the Heaven, this is said of the Mani Karan tract since the times immemorial. It is just like *Kashi Kshetra*. There is no doubt about it. Out of all sectors (*Piths*) of the country, this sector which is called ‘*Kulant Pith*’ is the superior most. Here, the most sacred place of pilgrimage is Mani Karan and in it the ‘*Vishnu Kund*’ is the purest of all. Lord *Sankara* is mightily pleased to stay here. This is absolutely true. No other tank in the world, could be more pure than these high rising tanks. Even a drop of water from the tanks will make one free of all evils. *Narad*, on account of the influence of the *Sankara*’s eye, this sacred place, causes the disappearance of anger and evils. One who eats the food cooked in this boiling water goes to the *Vishnu Lok* (Heaven).’ *

* *The Mythological Background of Beas Valley*—(unpublished Manuscript by an anonymous writer)

SOME OTHER SHRINES OF KANGRA AREA

Brief mention may be made of a few other shrines of Kangra area. This area had unfortunately been subjected to several plunders and the rulers of Kangra have had their full share of the vicissitudes of fortune. The temples have often been plundered and the gold and silver taken away. The Earthquake of 1905 had also damaged some of them.

“The temple of Devi, situated in this suburb of Bhawan, is among the most ancient, as it was once one of the most renowned shrines of Northern India. It finds historic mention in Ferishta’s account of the fourth invasion of India by Sultan Mahmud A.D. 1009 and again in A.D. 1360, when for a second time it was plundered by the Emperor Firoz Tughlak. In the time of Mahmud, if Ferishta is to be at all credited, the riches of the shrine were enormous. Elphinstone, who draws his account from Ferishta, described it as “enriched by the offerings of a long succession of Hindu princes and the depository of most of the wealth of the neighbourhood.” The treasure carried off by Mahmud is stated to have been 7,00,000 golden *dinars*, 700 *mans* of gold and silver plate, 200 *mans* of pure gold in ingots, 2,000 *mans* of unwrought silver, and 20 *mans* of jewels, including pearls, corals, diamonds and rubies. The shrine is largely resorted to by pilgrims from the plains at the great festivals held in April and October. The old temple having been destroyed by the earthquake of 1905 it has been rebuilt by the Kangra Temple Restoration Committee with the aid of subscriptions raised throughout the country.”*

The temples of Masrur are rock-hewn shrines very common in Western and Southern India but practically unknown in the Himalayan region. The origin of these rock-cut temples at a height of 2,500 feet is rather shrouded in doubt. They are about twelve miles from Nagar Kot and were first

* *District Gazetteer of Kangra*, 1924-25 (page 494).

noticed by a civilian officer H. L. Shuttleworth in 1913 and then surveyed by Mr. H. Hargreaves of Archaeological Survey in 1915-1916. There are 15 shrines of *Shikhara* type with profuse sculpture. As mentioned elsewhere the Thakurdvara temple is the main with three-stone images, said to represent Rama, Lakshmana and Sita. The images are obviously much more recent than the icon of Siva in the centre of the lintel of the main shrine. A reasonable presumption has been made that it was originally a Siva temple. Mr. Hargreaves assigns the monument to the eighth century or somewhat later.

Regarding the temple of Ambika Devi in Kangra fort and that of Indreshvara in Kangra proper the District Gazetteer mentions :

“The temple of Ambika Devi is a much plainer structure, evidently of no great age. The only ancient portions seem to be the pillars and architraves of the *mandapa* or ante-room which originally must have been on open, twelve-pillared pavilion, roofed over in the corbelling fashion of Hindu architecture. By bricking up the intercolumnations the pavilion was converted into a square chamber now covered by a flat dome. The latter feature indicates that this reconstruction happened during the Muhammadan occupation. The adjoining building, used as the shrine proper, must have been a monument of the short period during which Sansar Chand held the Kangra Fort. The clumsy shape of the spire bears ample evidence of its late date. It is a curious example of the capricious action of the earthquake, that this building was destroyed, whereas the adjoining *mandapa* did not show any sign of injury.

To the south of the Ambika temple there are two small Jain shrines, facing west. One of them contains merely a pedestal which must have belonged to a Tirthankar image. In the other is placed a seated statue of Adinatha with a partly obliterated inscription dated, according to Cunningham, in *Samvat* 1523 (A.D. 1466) in the reign of Sansar Chand I.

In the city of Kangra the only place of any antiquity is the small temple of Indreshvara. It is ascribed to Raja Indra-chandra the first member of whose name, according to a common practice, is coupled with that of the deity-Isvara, i.e. Siva to whom the shrine is dedicated. If Cunningham was right in identifying this Indrachandra with the Induchandra of Jalandhara mentioned in the *Rajatarangini* (VII, 150) as a contemporary of Anantadeva of Kashmir (A.D. 1028-63), it would follow that the Indresvara temple dates from the 11th century. The most valuable and at the same time the most delicate portion of the edifice, viz., the open pavilion supported on four ornamental pillars which sheltered Siva's bull Nandi, collapsed in the earthquake. To the east of this pavilion is the shrine containing the *lingam* which forms the object of worship. It measures only 9 feet 2 inches square outside. The floor is 2 feet below the level of the paved street which shows the amount of accumulation that has taken place since the temple was built. To the south of the pavilion is another chamber which seems to have been the original shrine. On both sides of its entrance are two Jain images described by Sir Alexander Cunningham. One of these images represents the Tirthankar Adinatha, as is indicated by the effigy of a bull on the pedestal. It bears, moreover, a Sarada inscription, dated in the year 50 of the Lokakala or Saptarshi era. Dr. Buhler, who edited the inscription, believed it to be nearly contemporaneous with the Baijnath eulogizes on account of the similarity of the character."**

Within the fort of Nurpur, once the seat of the Pathania Rajas is a ruined temple excavated in 1886 by the Archaeological Survey. Only the basement of this temple is in existence, a building with remarkable wall paintings. There has been some research on the wall paintings which has been mentioned elsewhere. The reference in the old District Gazetteer of 1924-1925 will be of some interest now that we know more of the wall paintings.

** *District Gazetteer of Kangra*, 1924-25 (page 505-506).

"This temple, of which only the basement is extant, is a building of considerable size belonging to the mixed Hindu-Mughul style of architecture which came into vogue under the tolerant rule of Akbar. It is 117 feet long and 50 feet wide externally. It is built of red sandstone and consists of an ante-room or *mandapa* leading through a central chamber to the sanctuary which is octagonal in plan with recesses at the angles. Its general plan is very similar to those of the temples of Govind Deo at Vrindaban and of Hari Deo at Govardhan near Mathura (Muttra). A characteristic feature of the temple is the profuse decoration of the outer walls, exhibiting effigies of cows, milkmaids and a figure which most probably represents Krishna judging from the character of these figures, we may assume that the temple was dedicated to Vishnu. In all probability it was built by Raja Basu (the founder of the fort, who died in A.D. 1613) and destroyed when the rebellion of his son and successor, Suraj, Mall, was suppressed by the army of Jahangir in A.D. 1618."*

* *District Gazetteer of Kangra*, 1924-25, (page, 507-508).

BAJRESHWARI DEVI

Mr. F. Cunningham's District Gazetteer of Kangra has the following account of the Bajreshwari temple in Kangra:—

"The temple of Bajreshwari or Vagreshwari Devi at Kangra is perhaps the most famous in this district. It is said to have been founded by the divinity of that name at a famous *Ashwamedh* or horse sacrifice which was held on the spot. The famous Mehmood of Ghazni is said to have invaded the district and destroyed the temple, building a mosque on its ruins. It was, however, restored and is said to have been visited by Akbar together with his celebrated Diwan Todar Mal. There are some temples in the vicinity which are said to have owed their origin to Todar Mal. Finally, Maharaja Ranjit Singh visited and under his orders the domes of the temples here and at Jawalamukhi were gilded. Subsequently devotees from Amritsar subscribed together and presented the temple with marble floor."

According to legend there was a severe and prolonged drought in Kangra area of Beas basin and hundreds of people started dying. A few devotees fasted and did *havan* and penance to propitiate goddess Durga. It is said the goddess showed them the spot where the breasts of Sati had fallen and wanted a temple to be built for the goddess Bajreshwari at that place. Bajreshwari was another manifestation of Sati. This mythical origin of Bajreshwari Devi and the temple enshrining her is firmly believed throughout Himachal Pradesh. Thousands of people visit the temple and the rush is greatest during the *Navratra* days.

The valuable jewels and other articles offered to the deity by the devotees attracted the invasion of Sultan Mehmood of Ghazni in 1009. It is said the temple was plundered and gold, silver and jewels were carried away. A small garrison was left at the place by Sultan Mehmood. But thirty-five years later the Hindu princes under the guidance of the Raja

of Delhi regained possession. A replica of the idol was enshrined.

In 1360 Kangra was again invaded by Emperor Feroz Tuglak and the temple was again plundered and desecrated. Emperor Akbar is supposed to have visited the temple with his *dewan* Todar Mal and restored the temple to its previous glory.

CHINTPURNI DEVI TEMPLE

Along with hundreds of mythical legends about the origin of a temple in different parts of India, the very popular temple of Chintpurni temple is of the same type. The legend is that one Bhagat Mai Dass was a great devotee of Durga deity and worshipped her with great devotion and never bothered over mundane affairs. He was a married man and his family along with others had shifted from Patiala side to village Rapoh in Una district of Himachal Pradesh.

The legend is that one day Bhagat Mai Dass was going to his father-in-law's place and felt tired while by a jungle and slept under a tree. He had a dream : a young girl appeared before him and wanted him to stay there and worship her. He woke up in bewilderment.

He came back to the particular spot from his father-in-law's place and went on praying to Durga. The girl appeared this time in human form and told him the whereabouts where he would find her in the form of a *pindi* (a round stone-ball). He should instal the *Pindi* in a temple. The Devi blessed him that he would have no fright as it was a *Devasthan* (site of Gods) though so deserted. She disappeared and Mai Das discovered the *Pindi* and installed it in a temple.

It is believed that the place is where the toes of Sati goddess had fallen being cut off by the *Chakra* of Vishnu Lord when he was cutting away the pieces of Sati's dead body carried by Lord Siva in his *Tandava Nritya*. The *Pindi* represents Sati's feet and is a manifestation of her. *Chintpurni Devi* is believed to fulfil the desires of a person who comes there and devotedly worships her. The temple is very popular and attracts thousands of pilgrims every year. The jungle has almost disappeared. The *Mantram* repeated in the *Pujah* is said to have been revealed by the Devi herself when she appeared in human form.

BAIJNATH TEMPLE

The District Gazetteer of Kangra has the following observations regarding the Baijnath Temple* :

One of the most remarkable monuments of the Bias valley is the temple of Baijnath. The village of that name is situated 23 miles east of Nagarkot, as the crow flies, close to the Mandi border and on the main road which leads from the Punjab plains through Kangra, Kulu, Lahul, and Ladakh to Central Asia.

Baijnath is in reality the appellation of the chief temple dedicated to Siva Vaidyanatha ("Lord of Physicians") by which the village itself has become known. The original name of the village was Kiragrama.

The Baijnath temple is orientated due west. It consists of a *puri* or adytum, 8 feet square inside and 18 feet outside, surmounted by a spire of the usual conical shape, and of a *mandapa* or front hall, 20 feet square inside, covered with a low pyramid shaped roof. The adytum which contains the *linga* known as Vaidyanatha is entered through a small ante-room with two pillars in antis. The roof of the *mandapa* is supported by four massive pillars connected by raised benches which form, as it were, a passage leading up to the entrance of the sanctum. The architraves resting on these pillars divide the space of the ceiling into nine compartments, each of which is closed by means of corbelling slabs.

In front of the *mandapa* rises a stately porch resting on four columns. "The shafts of these pillars," Fergusson remarks "are plain cylinders, of very classical proportions, and the bases also show that they are only slightly removed from classical design. The square plinth, the two toruses, the cavetto or hollow moulding between are all classical, but

* District Gazetteer of Kangra (1924-25) page 501-4.

partially hidden by Hindu ornamentation, of great elegance but unlike anything found afterwards." The capitals of the pot-and-foliage type are discussed by the same author at considerable length.

Both the south and north wall of the *mandapa* are adorned with a graceful balcony window. The four corners are strengthened by means of massive buttress-like projections in the shape of half-engaged miniature *sikhara* temples, each containing two niches in which image slabs are placed. Smaller niches in slightly projecting chapels are found between the corner projections and the entrance and balcony windows.

It was assumed by Cunningham and Fergusson that the Baijnath temple had undergone a thorough restoration at the hands of Raja Sansar Chand Katoch (A.D. 1776-1824). But Sir Aurel Stein, who had the advantage of personally inspecting the temple in December, 1892, expressed the opinion that the building "has not undergone such very great alterations as the earlier describers state." He points out, that the doorway of the adytum is still decorated with the images of the river goddesses mentioned in the inscription. Only the roof seems to be modern; and according to the statements of the local priests it was renovated in the days of Raja Sansar Chand, II.

The temple of Baijnath, although situated at no great distance from the centre of the earthquake of the 4th April, 1905, suffered but slight injury from that catastrophe. The neighbouring smaller temple of Sidhnath, on the contrary, completely collapsed.

BAGLAMUKHI DEITY AND HER TEMPLE MIRACLES DO OCCUR EVEN NOW

The Beas-Sutlaj Link authorities in the course of the execution of the Project had decided to acquire the Baglamukhi temple and the village of Bhakli in Mandi as the area had to be submerged in the Pandoh reservoir. The temple has a legend behind it and was not very old either. Mandi Raj had conferred some *Jaigir* (rent-free grant of land) for the maintenance of the temple and the regular *pujah* of Baglamukhi deity.

After the formalities had been observed of serving notices etc., the Acquisition Cell of the Project consisting of a gazetted Sub-Divisional officer and his staff visited the area and wanted to assess the valuation of the property for payment of compensation.

The *Gur* (diviner) of the Devi gave out that he had a visitation and the temple should not be dismantled and that the Devi would resent any disturbance. The plea was summarily rejected and some members of the Acquisition Cell of the Project entered the interior of the temple. Some unseen force in the cell suddenly hit the intruders who fell down. They felt stifled and came out gasping and streaming in perspiration. Everyone was aghast with apprehension.

Immediately then the *Gur* got into a religious trance and blurted out that the men should not have desecrated the temple and the Baglamukhi Devi would only be appeased if a goat is sacrificed. The Sub Divisional Officer immediately bought a goat for Rs. 30/- and sacrificed. Then they could proceed to do their work. The *Gur* had assured them that the Devi which was only a round stone had come out of water and would remain satisfied in water. The temple was submerged in due course along with the Deity.

The story associated with Baglamukhi Devi is that centuries before people of Mandi State used to go to Guma

village on Mandi-Pathankot road and used to scrape out rock-salt from the Guma salt mines. The path was without any habitation and the people going for salt would carry cooked food.

A man from Bhakli village which has been submerged now by Beas project was on his way to Guma for salt. On the way he stopped under a tree and opened his bundle of food and he found a stone in the midst of the eatables. He threw away the stone. At the second halt again on opening the food he found the same stone. He was bewildered and threw it away again. At Guma and again on the way back the same miracle happened. Exasperated the man threw away again the stone into a stream called Bakhli.

On return to his village he spoke about the incident to some persons and brooded and brooded. He showed abnormal symptoms and rushed out to the stream and disappeared by jumping into it. The villagers thought he had become mad and committed suicide. They performed his *sradh* (funeral observations).

Eighteen days after the man appeared with a ladle with smouldering incense and the self-same round stone. At first he was taken to be a ghost but the village diviner pronounced him to be the same person.

The man gave out the stone was Baglamukhi Devi, a powerful manifestation of Durga and she wanted a temple to be built and consecrated to her. This was done and the round stone was installed as the deity. The doors and lintels, however, had carvings of Krishna episodes.

The Raja of Mandi learnt about the appearance of the Devi and visited her. He gave a *jagir* for the temple.

The Baglamukhi Devi was widely propitiated and deeply venerated and the temple attracted pilgrims from far and wide till the implementation of the Beas-Satlej Project submerged it.

CHAMUNDA NANDIKESHWAR

Goddess Chamunda is seated at Jadrangal village in Kangra area located on the right bank of Baner *Khad* (Banga), a tributary of Beas river. The place is about 20 Kms. from Kangra town.

There is a Siva *lingam* under the rock where the temple of Chamunda is sited. There are no legends about the *lingam*. The idol is called Nandikeshwar. So the sacred site is called Chamunda Nandikeshwar.

In *Jallandar Mahatmya*, Chapter VI reference is made to Chamunda Nandikeshwar and people believe the reference is to these two deities Chamunda and Nandikeshwar.

The legend associated is well-known. In *Satya Yuga* two *Daityas* (demons), Shumbh and Nishumbh engaged themselves in deep meditation and were blessed by Lord Brahma with immense power. The *Daityas* deified Indra and other Gods. The Gods were terrified of the *Daityas* and resorted to Jadrangal village and propitiated Jagadamba Devi. The Devi was pleased and promised to rescue them from the *Daityas*.

She created a Devi out of her body, a beautiful person Kaushika. Kaushika was given the assignment of destroying Shumbh and Nishumbh.

The two *Daityas* heard of her beauty and wanted to bring her to them. They failed to persuade her to come to them through a *doot* (messenger) who was scornfully sent away. Kaushika sent word through the messenger that she could only be won by a war.

A dreadful war started. Kaushika Devi created '*Kalika*' *Shakti* from her forehead and Kalika cut off the heads of Chund and Mund, two brave and fearless commanders of the two *Daityas*.

The destruction of the *Daityas* followed and the three worlds were relieved of the *Daityas*. Kaushika Devi blessed Kalika Shakti and asked her to be seated at Jadrangal village and be known as Chamunda. She would fulfil the desires of the needy persons.

This mythological story is based on *Devi Bhagwati*, *Markandey Puran* and *Durga Saptasati*.

There is another story about the siting of Chamunda. She was seated first on a higher mountain near a fort built by Raja Chandra Bhann of Kangra. A blind devotee of Chamunda pleaded with the Devi to shift to a lower place where he could go more easily. The Devi agreed and came down to the present lower site. The Chamunda Devi was installed in a cave.

It is said the temple was built about 700 years back. The great earthquake of 1905 which had created havoc in this area did not cause any damage to the temple.

TEMPLES AND LEGENDS OF SIRMUR

Sirmur*district in Himachal Pradesh is more advanced and closer with affiliations to the surrounding States. There are more of communication links. The components of the higher castes in Hindus are the Rajputs and Brahmins. There is more of literacy and education. Originally a Princely State Sirmur had Nahan, an urban area as its capital. The line of ruling princes was enlightened. They had sponsored a number of temples themselves and had endowed many other temples with gifts of lands. Naturally we find here a very large number of temples for a large number of different deities. There are large religious fairs and the fair at Rainka is one of the most important and attracts thousands of visitors from different parts of Himachal, Haryana and Punjab.

There are quite a few prominent religious cults and some of them are almost indigenous to this district. The religious cult of Shirigul, the word is fancifully derived from *Sard* (cold), has thousands of adherents and a large number of temples. The home of the Shirigul God is on the Chaur (chin) peak which is visible from Simla. Similarly the cults of Mahasu or Mahashiv and Paras Ram have a large number of temples dedicated to Mahasu and Paras Ram. Besides we find a large number of Thakur Dwara temples in this district scattered all over. There are also temples dedicated to Hanuman, Sita, Ram, Shiva, Devi, Ganesh and Nag. The Devi cult deities are quite a few. We have temples of Naina Devi, Durga, La Devi, Bhadarkali Devi, Kali, Bhangain Devi, Kudan Devi, Similasan Devi, Balasundri Devi, Nai Devi and Tribhavani Devi. We have already referred to the Rainka fair where the famous temple of Rainka Devi is located and attracts thousands of pilgrims every year. The manifestations of the Mother cult divinities as mentioned are quite a few. So there are also a number of Vishnu cult temples. This makes us hold that Shiva, Shakti and Vishnu are really the three princi-

* The word *Sirmur* is derived from *Sir* (head) and *mair* (crown).

pal Divinities that have their hold on this district. There are various legends about some of the temples of Shirigul, Mahasu, Paras Ram and Thakurdwara temples. There are also legends associated with the temples of Jawala Mukhi, Rainka Devi, Nag, etc., and some of them will be mentioned.

Besides the temples of these well known Divinities we have a number of temples, big or small, belonging to a few other cults probably, more or less, indigenous to the area. There are cults of *Pap* or *Papra*, *Bhat*, *Gugga Pir* and *Nath*. There are temples belonging to these cults.

One striking feature is that there is no rigidity or exclusiveness in the devotees so far as their presiding deity is concerned. A devotee of Lord Shiva will equally be attracted to the Devi temples. Another particular feature about the district is that the priestly functions are not exclusive to the Brahmins. It is the Rajputs who work as the priests in many temples. In some, the priests belong to castes other than Brahmins or Rajputs, for some of the temples the worshipper has to bring his own *Bhat* to do the rituals.

The Rainka fair has to be mentioned at the very beginning as this is a fair where different images are brought from different places and worshipped. The fair is held on the eleventh of the bright half of moon "*Deo-Uthni Akadshi*" in Kartik month lasting two days. As many as twelve images are brought to the temple on that occasion. Four of Paras Ram, one each from Jamu and Kataha in Rainka tahsil, and Dugana in Paonta tahsil; three images of Shirigul, from Manal Deva in Rainka, and from Shaya (tahsil Pachhad) and from Jaitak (Nahan tahsil); the images of La Devi from Birlah (Nahan), of Manar Devi from Manaria, and of Naina Devi from Bhaila (tahsil Rainka) and the images of the deities Gau from Kotla Molar, and of the Barah Rupi from Kando Ungar (Rainka tahsil). The legend is that the deities had expressed desire to visit the fair at Rainka and so they are taken there. Each deity is carried in a *Palanquin* and followed by a procession of the villagers with flags, silver mace, musicians and musical instruments. The image of Paras Ram from Jamu is treated with special ceremony. The images arrive in the afternoon

of the first day of the fair, stay there for receiving homage the next day and usually return, on the third day.

The Paras Ram temple at Jamu (tahsil Rainka) has a special importance. There are nine priests (*Pujaris*) who are *Bhats* of Hiyon village and have the duty of worship for a month each in turn. The *Pujari* has to live in the temple and must not visit his house or family. It is believed that the God gets a blame if anyone goes hungry. The musicians have to ascertain if there is any hungry person in the village before the flute is played to awake the God. The story is the first incarnation in the form of boar while the second incarnation was human, whose father was Kanwal Rishi and mother Udhma Wati. In the Paras Ram temple at Jamu there are about seventy images. The image of Paras Ram in brass occupies the principal seat with a gold canopy, a necklace of silver with a gold mohar in which is set a diamond, a silver *palanquin* and a mace. The God is worshipped as a guardian against disease in men or cattle.

There are other principal Paras Ram temples at villages Dugana, Masu and Jamdagan Hill, which are quite famous. The temple at Dugana has three stone and two brass images, one of which was broken by the "*Jhalla*" which word literally means mad. It is said that the God at times possesses a man who behaves in an abnormal manner and communicates with the devotees. Since the "*Jhalla*" broke an image, a third stone image was brought from Rainka and installed.

As a God Paras Ram is rather temperamental. He could be angry and bring about poverty and sickness. He could bring cattle epidemic. If there is an unfulfilled vow to Him, he gets angry. But if he is pleased, he showers offsprings, prosperity and success. For worshipping Paras Ram, a pitcher has to be filled with water but according to tradition no shadow must fall on it while it is being filled. The *Puja* is done with the blowing of conches, lighting of lamps and offering of *Bel* leaves, rice and flowers. The Paras Ram temple at Jamdagan Hill though dismal in appearance commands a superb view all around. From the top many

streams look like silver streaks and the distant Dun valley and the Dharthi range appear most attractive.

The Hanuman temple at Juhama (tahsil Pachhad) was raised by one Ram Dass in fulfilment of a dream. On Janmashtami day a small fair is held here.

The Jagannath temple at Nahan constructed by Raja Budh Parkash in 1681 is rather a departure as there are very few Jagan Nath temples in Himachal Pradesh earlier to this. It is said, the Raja had a dream that Lord Jagan Nath was confined in an idol under the pipal tree to the North of the old capital and wanted to be unearthed and installed. The Raja did it.

Mention has to be made of the Thakurdwaras which house a variety of deities. Mostly these temples are dedicated to Lord Krishna. The Thakurdwara temples in Sirmur district are to be found in almost every part and show the tremendous hold of Vishnu cult. There are Thakurdwara temples at Badgala, Bhuira, Karganum villages (all in tahsil Pachhad), Nahan, Naoni (tahsil Nahan). The village Thakur Dwara in tahsil Pachhad has also a Thakurdwara.

Particular mention has to be made of Shirigul temple at Chaur Peak (Chin Peak) which is said to be the place of origin of Shirigul deity. The statue is a *lingam* and is also known as Chooreshwar Mahadev. On the first Sunday in the month of Ashad a large fair is held. Worship may be performed at any time and a worshipper usually brings with him his own *Bhat* to act as priest. Often "*Jagra*" or uninterrupted vigil-worship for a whole night is done. The Shirigul temple at village Manal has two fairs in the year. Men and women dance, the "*Gi*" dance, which is absolutely local as a part of the fair. Shirigul has several small temples in various villages of the Paonta tahsil, where small religious fairs are held on particular auspicious days. The Shirigul temple at Gagal Sakar has a legend. It is said that a sadhu came there immediately before the Gurkha invasion and poisoned the water of a nearby tank causing the death of all the Sirmur troops camped there to fight with the Gurkhas, as also of many

of the local residents. Previously this village was called Dharampur, but, after this incident, the name of Gagal Sakar was given to it, for a sizable part of the entire village population had perished of the poison. At that time Shirigul is said to have descended from Choor in order to save the inhabitants from complete destruction and total annihilation. He assured the people of the fulfilment of all their desires if they pinned faith and belief in Him. Thus the deity established Himself here. A curious incident has been handed down by tradition, namely that while incense was being burnt here on *Diwali* day, about twenty five years ago, a sound was heard from the void exhorting that who-soever would worship Shirigul shall be rewarded according to his desires. Worship is performed here on every Sunday and "*Sankranti*." Animal sacrifice has ceased and instead, "Halwa", Sweets etc. are offered. On the Kartika "*Amavas*", once in three years, a vigil is performed by the people when offerings are made.

There are Shirigul temples at villages Sarahon, (tahsil Pachhad). The *Pujaris* are Rajputs as in all the Shirigul temples. It is said that Shirigul, being the son of a Brahmin woman had a soft corner for the Brahmins, and exempted them from performing the duty of a *Pujari*.

The Mahasu (Mahashiv) temples at Siyol and other villages usually have a *Pujari* who gets into trance and solves problems for the devotees. "*Jagra*" (night-long vigil) at Mahasu temple is quite common. As mentioned before Mahasu is Lord Shiva himself. There are Shiva temples at a number of villages in the district. The more important ones are at village Mangarh which is an ancient one. The legend is that the temple existed when the Pandavas visited this area. It is said that Lord Shiva had practised penance there. The Shiva temples at Rampur Ghat, Nahan and Deothi have also different legends. The usual legend is that there was a sudden find of the Shiva-linga on a dream leading to the discovery of the *Linga* which was housed in a temple. Fairs are held at some of these villages particularly on auspicious days.

Bijat is the God of lightning. The legend is that Agyasur the demon hostile to the gods assailed the Choor Peak and the temple of Shirigul there. Bijat fell upon him in a form of lightning and from the lightning came out an image which fell to earth at Saran village where a temple was built. Another image of Bijat was brought to Saran village from Tatwa village (Rainka tahsil). There are now Bijat temples at villages Deona, Bandal (tahsil Rainka), Gundal Dagalga (tahsil Pachhad). Bijat is propitiated by the beating of drums and night-long vigils are common.

Goddess Ghatriali has a temple at village Panjaha (tahsil Rainka). Closely connected with the cult of Bijat is that of the goddess Ghatriali, who has a temple at Panjaha in Rainka tahsil, similar to that of Bijat at Barol. The ritual is also the same and no fair is held. The legend regarding this temple avers that a certain Kanet chieftain, Bija by name, of Tatwa village, once sallied forth with eighteen of his followers to attack his enemies in Dahar. When the assailants reached Dahar they were seized with a sudden panic and fled homeward, but, on reaching Bhaluna, 1.6 km (a mile) from Dahar, they met some women bearing pitchers. On asking who the women were, they told that the women belonged to Jamlog, a village at which a "*Jagra*" (nightlong vigil) in honour of Bijat was being celebrated and that they had come to fetch water. Bija asked them if he and his companions could see the '*Jagra*' (vigil) and was told that they could come and see it, but must feel no fear of what they saw even when offered seats of serpents and scorpions by the people of Jamlog. The women also informed the party that they would be offered grains of iron to eat, and the women gave them rice which they could eat, instead, concealing the iron. Lastly, the women told them that if they were desired to take the image to their house for the celebration of a "*Jagra*" (vigil), they should seize it and flee with it, but must on no account look back. Accordingly Bija and his men went to Jamlog where they found three images being worshipped with great pomp, and were told that the finest image to which the greatest reverence was being paid was that of Bijat, the second that of Bihai, and the third that of Ghatriali. Bija, on the pretence that

he desired to worship the images, was allowed to draw near with his companions, and they then seized the images and fled. The men of Jamlog pursued them without success, but Bija's eighteen companions looked back and perished. Bija, however, did not take this false step and reached his house in safety, and concealed the image in his granary, which was nearly empty. When he opened the granary in the morning it was full to overflowing. Bija fell senseless at this miracle and was revived only by the sacrifice of eighteen he-goats. Then one of the three gods took possession of a man, who began to nod his head repeatedly saying he was Bijat, the god, and could not remain in Tatwa, as it was not becoming for him to live with his sisters. So the image of Bijat was sent to Saran in Chopal tahsil of Mahasu district where it still remains. The people of Tatwa then separated, dividing their property, some going to settle in Kandi, and the others remaining in Tatwa. The image of the goddess Bijat fell to the men of Kandi, and is now at Barol of Dasakna "Bhoj" (group of villages in charge of a "Siana" or "Ala"-lambardar), while Ghatriali remained at Tatwa and her temple was established at Panjaha in Tikri "Bhoj" (group of villages in charge of a Siana or Ala-lambardar).

There is a temple to Devi Jawala Mukhi (goddess of the flaming mouth) at Lana Rauna, concerning which the following legend is told. Mahant Tawar Nath and the Devi met at Hardwar, where they had gone to bathe, and, when leaving, the 'Mahant' asked the Devi when he should meet her again. The goddess promised to meet him after two years at Rauna, and duly manifested herself in his mouth, but the 'Mahant', being unaware of her advent, struck his mouth and thus caused the goddess to flee from him. Simultaneously the whole surrounding forest caught fire, and the people, thinking the 'Mahant' must be an evil spirit who had enraged the goddess, called in brahmins who found out the truth. It is said that the stones are still black from the fire which consumed the forest. The place having been purified, a temple was built and a brahmin priest appointed. A variation of this local lore holds that a saint, named Balgir, practising penance on the bank of Giri river, was inspired to establish

a sanctuary here. He brought the Devi from a sacred place. Here usual *pūja* is performed twice daily, morning and evening, by a priest permanently attached to the temple. The priest offers 'Bhog' every Sunday morning and on the first day of the month "*Sankrant*" in addition to the usual incense. The fair is held on the "*Durga Ashtami*" (eighth day of bright half) in Asauj. The offerings are generally simple, but, sometimes, if the purse of a devotee allows, even a goat is sacrificed. The income is expended on the maintenance of the temple which also owns about three bighas of land, cultivated by the priest. The Devi is regarded as the family deity by the people of the area. When a cow or a buffalo calves, a small portion of the ghee is offered to the Devi before the family starts using any part of it. In the case of illness, a vow is made in the name of the Devi and, on recovery, the vowed offerings are made. Jawala Mukhi temple is visited by a large number of pilgrims.

Nagarkoti Devi is supposed to have miraculous power of curing diseases both of men and cattle. There are temples to this deity at village Bajor and at Shaya (tahsil Pachhad). Nagarkoti Devi has her home at Shaya, Pajhota, and Sharauli, and the legend states that the Pandwas, on their way from Kailas to Kurukshetra, stopped at Shaya, and built a temple here for the goddess, or, as some say, brought the goddess here. Another legend is that this deity was brought from Nepal by the brahmins of village Paul in the neighbourhood of Shaya. The brahmins of Paul village had their landed estates in Shaya also but they had to abandon them in favour of the Devi. A priest was then appointed and allowed to live in Shaya for offering *Pūja*. Subsequently, the descendants of the priest multiplied to fill a whole hamlet. Now only ten bighas of revenue-free land are attached to the temple, and are cultivated by the priest. The yield is utilised to meet the expenses of the temple. A "*Havan*" (sacrificial fire) is performed here during the *Navratras* (the first nine days of the bright half) of Chet and Asauj. According to age-old superstition, people are afraid of entering the inner chamber of the temple, because those who enter into it would not, it is supposed, survive. The temple faces south, and, on the eighth day of the bright

half of the month, offerings are made to the goddess. Sapara is also associated with Nagarkoti Devi, but the place has a sanctity of its own, whether the goddess be present or absent. There is also a Nagarkoti Devi at Dalahan in tahsil Pachhad, known also as Dalahan Devi.

Special mention has to be made of Bhangain Devi at village Bhaung (tahsil Rainka) where the Goddess is represented by a *linga* which is generally the emblem of Shiva. It is said that certain cowherds used to graze cattle in a forest, and their children, seeing a pointed stone, broke it into pieces, but next day the pieces had joined together and there was left no trace of the breakage. This occurred several times, and so the cultivators of Dasakna, convinced of the *linga's* miraculous power, erected a temple there. Another legend would have us believe that Bhangain Devi, actually a sweepress, at one time, at Delhi, was brought up by Shirigul and assigned the place where its temple now stands. Shirigul did so to reward her for a favour on her part which enabled him to shake off the fetters put on him by the emperor of Delhi. Shirigul is believed to have once gone to Delhi to show his miraculous feats to the emperor. He had 1.1 kg (one-and-a-quarter seer) of mustard with him which, when put in a scale, could not be outweighed or even equalised by any quantity of commodities in the Delhi market. The emperor learning about it put Shirigul under surveillance and his miraculous power was subsequently reduced by defiling him with the touch of unworked hide. Shirigul managed to convey the incidence of his arrest to other deities, who, on arrival at Delhi, were imparted all secrets by the sweepress and were thus enabled to help Shirigul escape. The *linga*, 101 mm (four inches) high and as many in girth, is known as Devi Bhangain, and is never clothed or ornamented. There is no special priest and pilgrims bring their own brahmins. This practice of bringing one's own priests is an unusual custom in this area.

A particular legend is associated with Simlasan Devi at Dadholi (tahsil Pachhad). It is not known how and when a temple to this Devi came into existence in this village. The tradition, still current, would have us believe that the first

temple of this Devi was constructed at Shamlot, in tahsil Naraingarh of Ambala district. In the ancient times a war broke out between the gods and the demons. The gods considering themselves unequal to their enemies, especially Shumbh and Nishumbh, created this "Devi" goddess with eight arms, and deputed her to kill the demons which she successfully did after sanguine and pitched battles. Being of fierce and fighting nature and left without any work after the defeat of the demons, the Devi, turned to attack her creators. Much oppressed, they petitioned to Lord Shiva to rescue them who asked the Devi to stop killing. The Devi inquired as to what she should then do. She was directed to stay at Shamlot where, during the "Kaliyug" (dark age), she would be widely worshipped. In the course of time a temple was also constructed to her at Chalog in tahsil Pachhad. On the eighth and the ninth of the light-half in the month of Chet a small fair takes place here.

Associated with Simlasan Devi is the Goddess at Belgi village (tahsil Pachhad) who is also worshipped as the Goddess Simlasan Devi. A stone idol of the Devi is housed in a brick-built temple about four hundred years old. Apart from this idol the temple contains an iron lamp, a trident and a big chain. In front of the temple is a stone platform and a pipal (*Ficus religiosa*), tree adding to its picturesqueness. Worship is held primarily on the 'Katik Sudi Duj' (second day of the light half of Kartik) but, sometimes, if so desired, the Devi is worshipped on Sunday, on "Sankranti" and on full moon day also. Offerings of milk and clarified butter are made with careful exclusion of liquor and meat for the Devi is regarded as a 'Vaishnav' and a vegetarian. Hindus of the surrounding areas pin their belief in the Devi. They believe that her worship would be rewarded by bumper crops, immunity from cattle diseases, and abundant yield of animal products.

There are legends about Kudin Devi at Dudam and Langasan Devi at Karganun (tahsil Pachhad). There is a legend that she was a daughter of Suraj Parkash, Rajah of Sirmur who was blind and lived in Neri Jagela. When this chief refused to pay tribute to the Mughal emperor, the latter

sent a host against him through Dehra Dun, which was met by the *rajah's* army, under the princess herself. The Sirmur forces were annihilated in the battle, and the "*Purohit*" (Priest) of the princess brought her head to Dudham where he erected a temple, and began to worship her. Another version says that the princess fell in an attack on Delhi and after her death revealed to the "*Purohit*" (priest) that he would find her at a certain spot, at which, after a search, the *Purohit* found the image now in the temple. In the recorded history of Sirmur, however, these versions have not been mentioned. It is related there that the princess successfully quelled a local uprising that took place in the absence of her father, Rajah Suraj Parkash. The fair is held on the "*Ikadashi*" (eleventh day of dark half of the month) before the Diwali on which day the image is placed on a *Singhasan* or throne. This is also done on each Sunday in the Bikrami month of Har. Villagers have appointed a priest to perform *puja* regularly, twice daily. A sum of five rupees is given by the government to meet the expenses of *puja*. Offerings made by the visitors are distributed among themselves by the local brahmins. Two bighas of revenue-free land stand attached to the shrine. Valuable belongings of the Devi, including ornaments etc., are kept under the care of a "*Bhandari*" (store-keeper).

At Naog, now in the Punjab territory, lived Langasan Devi, the sister of another goddess named Kudin. Her present temple is at Karganun in tahsil Pachhad. A fair is held on the "*Ikadashi*" (eleventh day of dark half of the month) before the Diwali. It is said that she first appeared at the source of the river Giri, but others say she originated from that river at Karganun. Langasan Devi is believed to have fought in the guise of a man and to have fallen heroically in a battle either with Gurkhas or with Mughal armies or with local rebels of Sirmur. The traditions are not quite clear about her adversaries. In one version, Langasan Devi is believed to be the sister of Kudin Devi, daughter of Rajah Suraj Parkash of Sirmur, the principal heroine of the battle. All the versions, however, tend to point to her participation and fall in a battle. Her body was then brought to Neri

village where a temple was constructed and her image housed in it. A similar temple was erected at Karganun for *pūja* purposes but afterwards this village was depopulated and thus all the images were transferred to Neri. However it was resolved at that time, to bring the images of Devi to Karganun once in a year during the Solan fair in the Bikrami month of Asarh, and this practice continues.

Balasundri Devi temple at Tilokpur, (tahsil Nahan) has a great peculiarity. Here also the image of the Devi is like a stone *lingam* the emblem of Siva. There are two small temples in front of the main temple, one of Bhairon and the other of Chatur Bhuji Devi. A large annual fair is held in the Bikrami month of Chet. Though the fair has lost most of its importance because of the decline of the princely house, the number of pilgrims visiting the fair from different districts is to the tune of 15,000 persons.

The fight of the Rajputs of Nahan area with the Muslims is commemorated by some temples as well. The temple of Devi Katara at Bara Bam (tahsil Nahan) is one of them. According to legend in a battle between Rajputs and Ghulam Quadir Rohilla, a woman appeared fighting for the former when their defeat seemed imminent, and the Muhammedans were routed. A temple was built at Bara Ban to commemorate the Rajput victory. On the sixth day of the "*Navratras*" (first nine days of the bright half) in the Bikrami month of Asauj and Chet a "*Hawan*" (sacrificial fire) is performed in the temple. In the past the Rajah of Sirmur, occasionally, visited the temple in person or deputed a member of the royal family to be present at the time of the sacrificial fire. During this occasion, pilgrims in batches of twenty or thirty keep on coming and going. They offer at the altar of the goddess flowers and "*Patashay*" (a sweetmeat). It is said that in the past on every first Sunday of a Bikrami month, a lion used to come to the temple to pay his respects. The temple, constructed by Rajah Jagat Parkash (1830-1849 Bk. = 1773-1792 A.D.) enjoys a revenue assignment of five rupees from the Government. *Pūja* is held daily by a brahmin priest.

Towards the west of Rainka lake, adjacent to the shores of Paras Ram Tal, is a small temple in the usual dome-style dedicated to Rainka, the mother of the legendary hero Paras Ram. The temple is also called "*Math*" (monastery) in which is housed an idol of Rainka Devi. It is said that the shrine was constructed with great reverence by the Gurkhas in the beginning of 1814 A.D., when they invaded Sirmur and annexed certain parts of it. Subsequently, the Gurkhas were driven out. The "*Math*" is now, like many other temples, under the care and management of the local panchayat.

Rajputs are a martial race. The ruling house of Nahan would naturally patronise Kali temple. Towards the north-east of the Rajah's palace in the Nahan town is a temple dedicated to goddess Kali. It was constructed by Rajah Bijai Parkash during his reign, Samvat 1770-1806 corresponding to 1713-1749 A.D. Kali is worshipped by the Rajputs as the goddess of war. This image of Kali was brought to Sirmur from Kamaon by the Rani from Kamaon, wife of Rajah Bijai Parkash. Adjacent to this temple is a shrine of "Chaubis-Bhuji-Devi" (twenty-four armed goddess), constructed by Rajah Fateh Parkash. For the performance of *puja*, "Mahants" have been appointed. The first "Mahant" was Bharang Nath followed successively by Am Nath, Top Nath, Jawala Nath, Bir Nath, Devi Nath and Jagan Nath. After the death of Jagan Nath his disciple Namah Nath has been officiating but he was not appointed a full-fledged Mahant because of his intemperate habits and arrogant disposition. In his stead the then Rajah exercised the power of appointment of a Mahant in favour of Moti Nath, appointed as the Mahant in Samvat 1965 and formally installed on the *gadi* in Samvat 1966 corresponding to 1909 A.D. Mahant Moti Nath expired in the month of May 1942 A.D., and afterwards the temple remained under the direct control of the erstwhile Sirmur State up to October, 1945 A.D. when Shri Dayalau Nath was appointed.

There are also other Kali temples at other villages in the district. Among the other minor cults of faith that claimed followers mention has to be made of the cult of *Pap* or

Papra (Sin). It is the ghost of a disgruntled dead person who was neglected by his people that causes mischief, barrenness or disease and the Spirit has to be invoked and propitiated. It is said usually on being invoked the Spirit will get into a child who will start shaking his head and speak incoherently. On being asked, however, the child will explain whose ghost the *Papra* is, and also show the reason for the affliction. The possessed child gives the direction as to what should be done so that the men at fault can wash away their *Pap* (Sin).

Bhat is a class of people who claim their origin from the Brahmins. Some of them, in the past, passed into the ranks of local deities for one reason or the other. Their temples or places of worship are found in many villages. A temple of Bhat is situated each in villages Ser and Jagas of tahsil Pachhad and both are believed to be quite old. Here, the villagers worship the deity to ensure safety from diseases.

A legend woven round the establishment of the shrine has come down and runs that, when Jagu, a resident of Jagas, clad in white clothes, was proceeding to Mount Kailash, some satirical remarks such as "are your climbing heaven" etc., passed by some villagers, were heard by him. Following this incident, the Bhat disappeared on a ridge called Mara-Ki-Dhar and could not be traced by the people. After sometime, he himself re-appeared to tell a local man to construct for him a temple and a well at Mara-Ki-Dhar. His command was carried into effect. Since then the temple is extant. The villagers have appointed a priest who offers worship to the deity on each "*Sankrant*" (occasion of a planet's passage from one sign of the zodiac to another). He is paid in grains for this service. The people have full faith in the deity's miraculous power to cure diseases among the human beings as well as among the cattle. The patient can be cured of sickness, it is supposed, by the waiving of a handful of earth over his head in the name of the deity. The earth is then thrown away. The offerings include animal sacrifice also.

Ser village, it is believed, once belonged to Ajmal Bhat. The Bhat was issueless and gave away all his movable and

immovable property to the villagers in his life-time. For this act of munificence a shrine was built and dedicated to him and he is still worshipped, especially on each "*Sankrant*" (occasion of a planet's passage from one sign of the zodiac to another) and special festivals. Two images of brass, representing Ajmal are housed in the temple.

Gugga Pir has a temple at Nahan near the Circuit house where a fair is held every year on "*Gugga Naumi*" (ninth day of dark half of Bikrami month of Bhadon). Gugga's main worshippers are the Kolis and Dumras (Scheduled castes) and every village where there is a sizable Koli, or Dumra population there is expected to be a Gugga temple. The *Kanets* (a non-scheduled caste) also worship Gugga, who is supposed to cure snake-bite.

Nag-Naon temple at Purowala (tahsil Paonta) is an ancient temple damaged by floods now. When an old capital of erstwhile Sirmur State sank, the ruling dynasty became extinct. The royal priest, who survived the flood, brought from Jaisalmer a prince with his pregnant wife who gave birth to a son and a snake under a 'Dhak' (*Butea frondosa*) tree in village Purowala. The prince died in the way. The snake, left behind unattended also died and was buried and a temple was raised on its burial place. As a consequence of neglect of the snake blindness prevailed among the population. Then the snake on appeasement by the people restored sight to all. The surviving son of the prince founded the State with capital at Rajban. This dynasty ruled Sirmur till merger of the State into Himachal Pradesh. Nag is the family deity of the ruling dynasty till today. The idol of the Nag at Purowala is made of "Dhak" wood. Regular daily *puja* is not offered. On the first Sunday of the month grains are offered by the villagers. A fair lasting for three days takes place here on the Dussehra (the famous Indian fair held on the tenth of the light half of Asauj) when people assembled from far and near.

Sohr Devta temple at Paonwala houses two idols. According to local lore a Rajah from Dhara Nagari came here

to lead the life of a devotee and died here. The local inhabitants saw the rajah in dream, after his death, and he told them to worship him at that sacred place and promised that, the devotees would be rewarded by the removal of misfortunes and troubles and by the prevalence of peace and prosperity among the people. The people, therefore, jointly constructed a temple and placed two idols in it to be known as Shohr Devta. They also resolved that on the first day of the Bikrami month of Sawan each year a fair be held at this place in commemoration of the rajah. The fair is still held and called the 'Haryali-ka-Mela'. It starts from the priest's house whence an idol of the Shohr Devta is taken out in a palanquin and a procession attended by some of the villagers, with a "*Mutha*" or "*Chanwar*" (a fly whisk) swinging over the idol. The procession moves to the accompaniment of drums and other local musical instruments. The palanquin is finally brought before the temple and the idol removed from it and stowed in the shrine. A "*Havan*" (ritual sacrifice) is performed. This is followed by the shivering of anyone of the worshippers, who gets possessed.

The shivering person is believed to be in direct connection with the deity and any question or problem may be put to him to which he provides an answer or a solution. He forecasts events and also prescribes remedies to secure good and ward off evil. Some women also get possessed. The possessed person often gets quite frenzied, the shivering climaxing into quite violent convulsions. Since almost every possessed person is questioned, the whole proceeding has come to be called "*Puchhu*" (questioning) in the local dialect. Since, ultimately, it is the god or goddess, as the case may be, who is questioned, through the oracle, the whole act assumes sanctified solemnity.

NATH TEMPLES

At village Thor, in Pachhad tahsil, is an ancient temple with a gilt dome but no image. Worship is held every evening with music, incense, and the sound of conch. Pilgrims offer fruits and grains etc. The investment of the Guru, also called "Mahant" (prior), in this temple is quite a pompous ceremony. The temple was originally founded by Mahant Tawarnath but was subsequently rebuilt by Mahant Mayagir, eleventh in descent from Tawarnath. The names of the Mahants who have held this temple, in order of succession are, Tawarnath, Balgir, Bhawannagir, Ramgir, Sanjhagir, Mansagir, Daulatgir, Bachangir, Ilaichigir, Dhanagir, Mayagir, Dayagir, Shankargir, Purangir, Bhimgir, Akhandagir and Vishnugir (the present "Mahant").

There is a legend that once Rajah Mahi Parkash (1659-1678 A.D.) of Sirmur mounted an attack on the erstwhile Keonthal State (now included in Mahasu district), but was repulsed with heavy loss. Mahi Parkash, on enquiry, found that the Chief of Keonthal was being helped by a Muhammedan mendicant who was shielding the Keonthal army with a miraculous sheet which missiles could not pierce. Hearing of this, his Ranee advised Rajah Mahi Parkash to invoke the blessing of Mahant Tawarnath's successor named Balgir. The Rajah accordingly went to village Thor and caused the Mahant to accompany him during a second attack on Keonthal. This time the Rajah succeeded in subduing the Keonthal Chief and in gratitude to the Mahant, who had made the Muhammedan mendicant's magic ineffective, the Rajah desired the prior to ask for anything he wanted. The Prior said that he was a hermit and had no desires. The Rajah offered him "*Jagir*" a revenue-free land, but the "Mahant" refused it, saying that his "*Jagir*" was to beg alms. Upon this the Rajah had a special bowl and the first begging with that bowl done officially. The grains thus collected were sent to the "Mahant" with the '*Patar*' (bowl). A general order was also issued

that every house in the Sirmur territory should give the prior a bowl full of grain at each harvesting. This bowl is of copper, round and hollow like a local measure of grains called '*Patha*'. It is still sent by the prior round the villages to collect grains and, in the days of princely rule, used to be regarded as the royal warrant for the tax. As difficulty was felt in the speedy collection of the grains by means of a single bowl, the prior has had three more similar bowls made and can now send out four men at a time. Tawarnath's successors are "*Sanyasis*" (ascetics) though the "*Jogis*" (a particular sect, not necessarily practising "*Yoga*") who are also called "*Naths*," claim that the institution originally belonged to them. The Ranas of the erstwhile States of Theog and Balsan (included in Mahasu district) held the institution in great reverence and used to send their occasional offerings.

Temple of Gharib Nath, tahsil Paonta, has a large number of worshippers. It is believed that if a woman, who is barren or whose children die in infancy, bathes in the water of these wells, she is cured of sterility. The effect is supposed to be more certain if the husband himself draws the water. The woman herself, while on her return after the sacred bath, must not live, eat or cook in any one else's house, lest she transfers her own defects of sterility etc. to the inmates of that house.

Puja is performed by the priest twice daily. He visits the temple morning and evening, washes the idols, burns incense, lights a lamp of pure ghee and then retires to his house ensuring that the fire that he leaves behind in the "*Dhuni*" (fire place), existing adjacent to the shrine, is strong enough not to go out before he returns the next day. Animal sacrifice is not offered. Only '*Parsad* of *Halwa*' (sweet dish) forms the offering. People visit this temple from far and near in order to deliver their offerings of thanks-giving for the fulfilment of their wishes. The residents of Shivpur and surrounding villages, at each harvest, offer some food grains in the temple, which the priest takes away to his house for his consumption and also for meeting the temple expenses. In the event of the offerings falling short of requirement, the

priest goes from village to village to collect whatever grains he may receive.

The temples in Sirmur District show the people had fully adapted the main trinity of the Hindu God-heads, Shiva, Vishnu and the Shakti (Devi) while they had not given up the regional religious cults and some of the village Gods of the regional cults. Belief in malevolent spirits and the need of appeasing them has not been given up. The Brahmins are not the exclusive priestly class and the Rajputs, Bhats and in some cases even lower caste-men could officiate as the Priest. In tune with the religious trends in Northern India, religious festivals and melas are held on auspicious days. Animal sacrifices have replaced human sacrifice which was done at some places. Instead of buffaloes now goats are offered. The political and economical thrust on the houses of the Ruling Princes has affected the religious trends as temples are not being maintained as well, and no fresh endowments are being made. It is a good feature that there has not been that rampant vandalism in the thefts of idols that we find in some other areas of North India. We also find a lesser degree of mutual isolation and a certain degree of variability as to religious trends among the social groups in more mountainous and isolated areas like Kinnaur or Lahul and Spiti and in those of a lesser isolated Sirmur area. The religious context in Sirmur area appears to be relatively homogeneous with other advanced areas of North India.

TEMPLES AND LEGENDS OF BILASPUR

The entire area of the present Bilaspur district in Himachal Pradesh was a princely State and with the lapse of paramountcy in India was taken over under the Central Administration as a separate unit but not made over to Himachal Pradesh because of the multi-purpose Bhakra Dam Project over the Sutlaj* river. It was thought that till the Dam was completed Bilaspur should be under the Centre. This Centrally administered unit was merged on 1st July, 1954 into Himachal Pradesh State as a district. A picture of the erstwhile Bilaspur State will be found in the following account from the History of Punjab Hill States.

“Bilaspur State is situated in the Lower Sutlej Valley in the outer hills, and is divided into two almost equal portions by that river, named Warla and Parla. It is bounded on the north by Kangra and Mandi, on the west by Hoshiarpur, on the south by Hindur (Nalagarh), and on the east by Baghal and Suket. The Satluj enters the State from Mangal at the village of Kasol, and, traversing it in a tortuous course for 56 miles, leaves the territory at Naila and enters Hoshiarpur District.

The superficial area of the State is 448 square miles, and the population at the census of 1931 was 100,994. It is nearly oblong in shape, and is verdant and fertile, abounding in low hills, forests, grazing lands, rivulets and streams. Wells are thus unnecessary for irrigation purposes. Agriculture is the principal occupation of the people, who are chiefly Kanets.

Seven low hill ranges traverse the territory in various directions, and are named “the seven *dhar*s”. These are—*dhar* Naina-Devi, *dhar* Kot, *dhar* Tiuni, *dhar* Bandla, *dhar* Jhinjar, *dhar* Ratanpur, and *dhar* Bahadurpur.

* Also spelt Sutlej, Satlej appears in the old books.

From this circumstance the ruler of the State is called "The Lord of seven *dhars*."

The principal *dhar* is that of Naina-Devi, on which is situated Kot-Kahlur, the ancient capital and place of residence of the Rajas for many centuries, and from which the State received its original name. On the highest point is situated the Naina-Devi temple at an altitude of 3,595 feet, and a small town, also named Naina-Devi, stands on the plain below. The fort of Kot-Kahlur is on the north-western end of the range.

The highest peak in the State is on *dhar*-Bahadurpur, at 6,164 feet, on which snow falls in winter.

The present capital is at Bilaspur, from which the State takes its present name, having been transferred from Kot-Kahlur at a comparatively recent date. It stands on a plain on the left bank of the Satluj and overlooking that river. Traditionally the original name of the place was Biasgufa, the word *gufa* meaning "a cave", from the tradition that Bias-deo is said to have performed religious penance in the cave. From it the town was named Biaspur, which became corrupted to Bilaspur. It is situated 37 miles north-west of Simla.

Mr. Vigne who passed through it in 1835 and again in 1839 thus describes its situation :—"Bilaspur stands about 2,000 feet above the level of the sea. The situation is very picturesque: open, cultivated land, comparatively level, extends on both sides of the river. The verdure is of the richest description: the mountains, bold and elevated, surround the outskirts of the landscape and the noble river sweeps round the angle of the bank on which the town is built with a rapidity that would evince its eagerness for the notoriety it has so long deserved, and has hitherto failed to obtain."

The ruling family of Bilaspur is of the Chandarbansi race, and is descended from the ancient Rajas of Chanderi is Bandelkhand. It is interesting to note that traditionally the three Hill States of Kahlur (Bilaspur), Hindur

(Nalagarh) and Chanehni in Jammu, all claim the same origin.

The clan name of the ruling family is Kahlurea, from the name of the original capital, in keeping with common custom in the hills, in accordance with which the State usually took its name from its capital.”***

This was the princely State of Kahlur under a line of Chandarbanshi Chiefs. The first fort was built by Raja Kahal Chand in the 9th century A.D. In 1953, Raja Deep Chand, founded a new capital Vyaspur, after the great sage Vyas Deva. The old capital Sunhani was given up. The name Vyaspur appears to have been corrupted into Biaspur and then to Bilaspur. The district is now bounded by Mandi and Hamirpur districts on the north, Hamirpur and Una districts on the west, Solon district on the south and Solon and Mandi districts on the east. It has an area of about 1,161 sq. km. and according to 1971 census the population is 1,94, 786 only. The only proper town is Bilaspur, with a population of a little over seven thousand. The present town of Bilaspur is a new one. The old town Bilaspur with its beauty, dignity and tradition and quite a few ancient temples including those of Shri Rangnath Ji and Shri Gopal Ji and hallowed with Vyas Gufa (cave), the hermitage of the sage Ved Vyas Deva had to be submerged by the waters of the Satluj river because of the completion of the Bhakra Dam. The ancient temples had to go under the waters of the present lake of Gobindsagar, a large and attractive lake where water is collected and then canalised for human needs. Along with the human and animal population the deities were rehabilitated in a temple in the new Bilaspur town near the site of the Dam. This was a tragedy that could not be avoided.

Obviously the old Bilaspur town had its many charms and had attracted a number of European travellers including George Forster, William Moorcroft, Baron Charles

*** *History of the Punjab Hill States* by Hutchinson and Vogel, Vol II (1933) page 494-495.

Hugel, G. T. Vigne, Edward Thornton and M. C. Forbes,** Bilaspur has been known from ancient times for the temple of Shri Naina Devi located on the top of a hill. The hill is triangular and the summit commands a superb view of the sacred Anandpur Sahib Gurdwara in Rupar district (Punjab) on one side and the vast glistening Gobindsagar lake on the other. The temple is said to have been built by Raja Bir Chand in the eighth century. This may have been a reconstruction as according to accepted tradition when Lord Siva was having his *Tandava Nritya* with the dead body of his spouse Sati who sacrificed her life because of the insults heaped on her husband by her father Daksha, Lord Vishnu followed Siva with his mace and started cutting pieces of the body to save the world and the heaven from destruction. The eyes of Sati fell at this place and became a place of worship as a *Pitha-Sthan*. The sanskrit word for eyes is *Nayan* corrupted into *Naina*.

According to local legend, however, an Ahir, Naina in the employ of Raja Bir Chand found that his cows were voluntarily dropping milk on a stone. On information Bir Chand went and found the image of the Goddess Durga. The image was installed in a temple that was constructed. The temple was named Naina after the Ahir. The dome of the Naina Devi temple rises 915 metres about the sacred town of Anandpur Sahib in Rupar district. Guru Gobind Singh had visited Naina Devi temple before he undertook one of his military campaigns against the Mughals and a *havan* was offered. According to legend Guru Gobind Singh had presented his sword to the Devi and the Devi took form to touch the sword and disappeared. The Sikhs also visit Naina Devi temple and hold it in deep veneration.

Naina Devi temple and its surroundings had a tragedy recently.

** Hugel, Baron Charles *Travels in Kashmir and the Punjab* (1835).

Vigne, G. T. *Travels in Kashmir, Ladak etc.* (1844).

Moorcroft, William and Trebeck George, *Travels in the Himalayan Provinces* (1841).

J. B. Fraser, *Himalaya Mountains* (1820).

In the last week of August, 1978 due to heavy rains for days together there were landslides and about hundred acres of land below the Naina Devi temple caved in and villages below were very badly affected. More than hundred houses were buried.

Geological experts made an investigation after the landslides. The steps to the temple were buried and the temple could be reached only through *katcha-road*. The small township around Naina Devi temple was cut off from water supply as the electric motors pumping water upto the temple and the township were buried.

According to the geological investigation there is no immediate danger to the temple. But steps have to be taken. It is understood that a check-dam at the back of the temple would be built as a support. The villages Bharai and Bhagaran down below were very badly affected alongwith the township.

It is said that there was not much of firm rock underneath the Ghumanad area of Naina Devi temple and the loose earth started slipping along this slope causing the landslide. Every step has been promised to be taken by the authorities to save the 1300 year-old temple located at an altitude of 3,995 feet above sea level at the top of a hillock.

The problem will have to be faced squarely by the Government and the people. An auspicious festivity had followed soon after the disaster and there was no abatement in the zeal of the pilgrims in spite of many unprecedented difficulties. This shows the deep veneration with which this temple is held.

Hindus constitute almost the entire population of the district. There is a sprinkling of less than 3,000 Muslims and less than 2,000 Sikhs according to 1971 Census. Though numerically small, the Sikhs have six Gurdwaras in the district at village Paprola (tahsil Ghamarwin), and at Bassi, Guru Kak Lahaur, Harnora, Manjari and Mehla, (all at tahsil Sadr).

Vishnu, Siva and Devi (Durga) are the three principal Deities of Hinduism worshipped in this district. There are

a large number of temples of Vishnu and His various manifestations. Shri Gopal temple at old Bilaspur now submerged was the principal shrine that attracted the attention of all old travellers and pilgrims. Among the many Vishnu temples now the Shri Gopal temple at new Bilaspur, Thakur Dwara temples at Dobehata, Talwar, Chandpur, Aur, Kasol and Kanaum, Gopal temples at Panjgain and Solon are quite famous. Thousands of pilgrims annually visit the temples for worship.

It has to be noted here that the deity of *Nar Sing Avatar* is very prominent in this district. The ancient legend of Hiranyakashipu being killed by the *Nar Sing Avatar* of God Vishnu to save Prahlad is well known. The deity of half-man and half-lion is worshipped by men and women for the solution of problems and for ensuring the birth of a son. As customary in Himachal Pradesh there are mouth-pieces of some deities that recite the praise of the deity. If a barren woman worships *Nar Sing*, the mouth-piece sings particular songs with the accompaniment of music from two empty dried gourds connected by a bamboo rod. The woman usually goes into a trance and speaks at random and she is supposed to receive the blessings of *Nar Sing*.

There are *Nar Sing* temples at Bhaulra, Bhakra, and Sunhani (tahsil Sadr), Ghamarwin, Jajjar and Jhanjuta (tahsil Ghamarwin).

It is an interesting study as to how the *Nar Sing Avatar* of Lord Vishnu came to be so popular in this part of Himachal Pradesh particularly. Probably the martial spirit of the people of this district (a large number of Bilaspur men always join the Police and the Army) and the Princely house popularised this particular deity.

Lord Siva in His many manifestations has also a very great hold on the people of Bilaspur. There are a large number of Siva temples with symbols of the different manifestations of Lord Siva. The usual is, the *lingam* in a *yoni* and with the vehicle *Nandi*. Most of the popular Siva temples are at Tikri near Panjgain, Dhuni Panjail, Makri, Kheri, Saloa, Malokhar and Tobassangwana (all in tahsil Sadr).

The *Devi* cult is also very popular and the Goddess is known as Naina Devi, Badol Devi, Hari Devi, Bhagwati Devi etc. There are Devi temples distributed all over the district as mentioned before. The Naina Devi temples in Sadr tahsil is the most popular. There is a legend about the Devi temple at Jamthal which may be mentioned here :—

“A weaver was working in a field when he suddenly struck an idol with his hoe. The idol started bleeding. The weaver was terrified and felt pangs of inner pains for what he had done. The Devi then appeared and asked him not to worry and, as an atonement, to build a temple to her in this village. The weaver, being a poor person, expressed his inability to do so. To erect the temple a person resident of Harnora village, situated nearby, experienced a queer happening; while asleep on his cot at night he would be thrown down by some invisible power. On occupying the cot again he would again be brought down. This continued for sometime until he prayed to the power that might be there to appear before him. The Devi then obliged him and asked him that he, being a person of means, should erect a temple to house her idol. He agreed and built the temple which is still extant”.**

Particular mention has to be made of a few other Hindu cults with their many temples in this district. The devotees of any of the three principal Hindu pantheon mentioned before could be a follower of these cults. These cults appear to have emerged out of the stories of valiant heroes of divine saints. Guga Chauhan a famous warrior had been associated with the Guga cult. Guga had been deified and worshipped by thousands. Baba Balak Nath was a saint, was deified and the cult of Baba Balak Nath or Dewat Sidh arose. Similarly Jhanda, an ancestor of Noiru Rajputs is worshipped by many and stories of Jhanda's heroic deeds are fondly recited.

The legend associated with Baba Balak Nath cult has been summarised as follows :—

“Balak was a Sanyasi boy born at Girnar in Kathiawar was endowed with miraculous powers. He made

** *District Gazetteer of Bilaspur* (1975) page 86.

many pilgrimages and eventually wandered to Talai in Bilaspur, where he became a cowherd. One day by the tank, from which the place derives its name, he met a band of saints, whose Mahant or the leader was a Nath. Balak entered into a disputation with this man, and the two agreed to test who was the more powerful of the two as miracle-worker. The Nath threw his stick for Balak to call it back. Balak made it come back floating in air. Balak then threw his stick but the Nath could not call it back. The saints seeing a greater than their greatest endeavoured to persuade Balak to become one of them, and, when he refused, thought to detaining him by force. Balak fled and jumped into the tank followed by the Nath. Both disappeared but were seen a little later to emerge from a cave, in a hill about five kilometres off, near Chakmoh. The saints went to the place, but when they got there the two had once more vanished and were never seen again. In course of time the cave became sacred, and Balak and Nath came to be worshipped as one deity under the name Balak Nath or Dewat Sidh.

The symbols of Balak Nath or Dewat Sidh are to be seen in most villages, and in some places alongside every house. Prayers and offerings are made on the first Sunday of each Baisakhi month. A large loaf is made and distributed among the worshippers. A favourite type of offering is a small pair of paten. Frequently a silvery charm is hung round the neck of a child in the name of Dewat Sidh, and worn by him till the day of his death. The following places of worship dedicated to Baba Balak Nath and other Sidhs command a good deal of name and fame in the localities in which these are situated-Baba Balak Nath Sthan at Bhapral and his temple at Changar Talai in Ghamarwin tahsil. In Sadr the places are Rang Nath temple in Bilaspur proper, Sidh temple at Bhail Dhar, Khorani and Talwar.”**

** *District Gazetteer of Bilaspur* (1975) page 87-88.

Guga cult has quite a few legends which differ from one another. One story is as follows:—

“Somewhere in the *Dakhan* (South) there were two issueless sisters, Bachla and Kachla, wives of a Chauhan Rajput named, Dev Raj. In the hope of begetting an issue Bachla went, one day, to the shrine of Gorakhnath and was told to come again when she would be given a fruit to eat after which a child would be assured to her. Kachla the sister of Bachla overheard this promise and went next day to the shrine in the guise and dress of Bachla. She received and ate the fruit. When Bachla went afterwards she found that her sister had already stolen her blessings. Bachla was, however, given another fruit half of which she ate and the other half she gave to the mare she was riding. To Kachla was born a daughter Gugri, to Bachla a son, Guga, and the mare in turn had a foal. Guga and this foal were brought up together. When Guga attained manhood he heard the fame of a beautiful maiden, and riding the horse (his foster brother) he went to woo her. For years he lived with her, being changed day by day by the sorcery of the country to a sheep, and by night resuming the form of a man. In his absence a pretender attempted to force his claim to force an entrance to the palace. The door-keeper who had grown blind ever since Guga's departure refused him admittance disbelieving his assertion that he was Guga. The door-keeper asserted that on Guga's return he would have received his sight. Ultimately being hard pressed, his cousin Gugri sent a letter by the hand of a brahman to Guga in Bangahal. He, realising the state of affairs, abandoned his life of pleasure and with the help of the brahman escaped from the sorcery that bound him. By the same aid the horse that had grown old and thin was restored, and Guga once more mounted his steed and reached his home town. On his return home the door-keeper regained his eye-sight and Guga and Gugri both performed miracles. They fought the enemies and once Guga even fought for some time after he had lost his head. After death he was venerated as

god, and has thereafter been always represented on horse-back. Any person suffering from a snake-bite is usually taken to a Guga shrine, where some cases get cured. The others who die are supposed to have committed some deadly sins from which the only redemption was death.”**

There are Guga temples at Bhatehr Uparli, Tiaman, Dhar, in tahsil Sadr and at Chakrana, Domehr, Ladda and Gherwin in tahsil Ghamarwin. Guga Pir is supposed to be a panacea for snake-bite. It is further said that if a vow to Guga Pir is not fulfilled the offender may be punished by a snake-bite. Both Guga Pir and Baba Balaknath have thousands of disciples in the provinces of Punjab, Haryana and Utter Pradesh besides Himachal Pradesh, Guga Pir's small shrine will be found in almost every village. He is symbolised by a small image on a horse and people worship there.

As usual there are many legends associated with Guga Pir. One story is Dev Raj, a Chauhan Rajput had two wives Bachla and Kachla. Both were issueless. Bachla visited the shrine of Goraknath and got a *bani* (message) that she should come again to get a fruit and by eating it she will get a child. Kachla came to know about it and quickly impersonated Bachla, for the fruit and ate it. Bachla visited the shrine later and after coming to know Kachla has already got the fruit was much disappointed. But she implored and got another fruit half of which she ate and the other half she gave to the mare she rode out of affection. Kachla had a daughter Gugri and Bachla a son, Guga, and the mare also had a foal. Guga and the foal grew up together and were very fond of each other.

On attaining manhood Guga performed many miracles. He was always found on horse-back. People used to rush to him on snake-bite and by his miraculous power Guga used to cure them. After death Guga was deified and worshipped.

Another legend runs thus:—

“In the ancient times the rana of Marudesh had two ranis named Kachla and Bachla, both sterile. The ranis were

** District Gazetteer of Bilaspur (1975) page 88-89.

keen to have issues. At the same time there lived a guru named Gorakh. Once the ranis went to the guru and requested him to grant a boon to enable them to have issues. The guru bade them to come the next day duly bathed and cleaned. Out of the two Kachla was more shrewd and next day she reached the guru earlier than Bachla. The guru gave her two mangoes to eat saying that that would bring her two sons. Then reached Bachla with a similar hope but the guru told her that he had only two mangoes which were given to Kachla and none was left with him now. She beseeched him with prayers and supplications whereupon the guru was pleased to produce another mango telling that on eating the mango she would give birth to a brave son who would prove to be the death of Kachla's sons.

In due course of time both the ranis conceived; the elder, Kachla, bore two sons, Arjun and Surjan; the younger rani, Bachla gave birth to a son, who on the advice of the astrologers, was named Guga. The legend goes on that when Guga was born the blind regained their sight, deaf got back their audibility and the lame were restored with their lost limbs. His birth was, therefore, hailed as divine and celebrated with great pleasure. The elder rani became envious of Guga and started hatching designs to finish him to clear the way for her sons to the throne. To gain her evil objective the rani invoked the help of the snake king (Basuki Nag) who deputed his son to fulfil the desire of Kachla. Guga, brave as he was, killed the son of this snake king who then came forward himself to bite Guga while he was swinging on a jhula. But Guga caught the Nag and was about to kill him when the snake king implored mercy and begged for life. This request was granted by Guga magnanimously. The serpent king, however, felt slighted and to avenge himself, he summoned all the serpents on the earth and deputed them to kill Guga. Guga, nevertheless, imprisoned all the snakes within a charmed circle, for a week.

It is a popular belief, current even today, that during the period of one week in the rainy season when the festival of Guga is on, the snakes either do not bite any man or even if they do the poison has no adverse effect.

Subsequently a fight ensued between Guga on one side and Arjun and Surjan on the other to capture the ancestral throne. Guga was ultimately triumphant and is, therefore, venerated and is praised in folk songs by the people to perpetuate the memory of his valorous deeds.”*

Lakhdata saint is also held in great reverence. There are a number of fairs held in the district in his honour and wrestling bouts form the chief feature in these fairs. Several villages claim to have the saint Lakhdata's grave. This shows the hold of the saint on the people. Another saint Deo Sur is worshipped by the women particularly. It is said that *Nar Singh Bir* was a servant of Deo Sur and attained sainthood by his service to Deo Sur. Deo Sur is worshipped on the first Sunday of the month. Another sage Markandey has been deified and is worshipped in a temple at village Makri (tahsil Sadr). Sage Markandey is said to be a contemporary of the sage Vyas who has given the name Biaspur and then Bilaspur to the district.

“A legend goes that a cowherd of village Makri noticed a cow entering the cave daily and returning after some time. Once he followed the cow and to his surprise saw a sage performing *havan* inside the cave. The sage asked the cause of his visit. The cowherd bewailed his poverty. The sage gave him a handful of rice. The cowherd tied the rice in a piece of cloth but later spurned the gift of rice and threw them away. A few grains, however, remained stuck in the piece of cloth. When he came out of the cave, he found that the few grains of rice had turned into grains of gold. He was then tempted and ran back to collect the thrown rice but was disappointed to find that a part of the cave had slid down and blocked the way. According to another version it is also said that

* *District Gazetteer of Bilaspur* (1975) page 89-90.

father of Markandey used to live here. He performed penance to appease Brahma for the sake of a son. His prayers were rewarded and he was blessed with a son. From then on people are rewarded with sons, and many of the diseases are cured by having a dip in this spring near the cave.”*

Khanmukheswar temple in tahsil Sadr has again different versions of origin worth a mention :—

“According to one, the temple was constructed in the memory of Kartikeya the eldest son of Siva, who was deprived of the throne in preference to Ganesh, the second son. Because of the partiality of Sati Parvati towards Ganesh, Kartikeya was cheated of his rights who was enraged and vowed to remain celibate. He took a vow that he would never bear the sight of a woman and that if any woman were to come across him she would turn barren for seven births on end. Under the dread of this curse, no woman ever visited this temple until about thirty years ago.

The second version is that while Siva was reciting Amarkatha to Parvati and she had fallen asleep, a parrot nestling in the tree above started repeating aye. At the end of the story when the God Siva broke his trance, he found Parvati fast asleep. He then looked for the repeater of aye. The parrot being thus detected flew away to save its life with Siva in his pursuit. The parrot eventually entered sage Vyas cave, entered his body of the sage's pregnant wife and was born as Sukh Dev. The Siva did not enter the cave for fear of the wrath of the sage Vyas, and therefore, seated himself at a place known as Khanmukheswar and himself went into trance”.**

All these temples of different deities have become pilgrim centres for the Hindus who go there from even much beyond the borders of the district. The religious fairs are quite a few and the most important is the *Shrawan Ashtmi* fair at Naina

* *District Gazetteer of Bilaspur* (1975) page 91-92.

** *District Gazetteer of Bilaspur* (1975) page 92.

Devi temple where about a lakh persons, Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims from Punjab, Haryana and even Uttar Pradesh rush alongwith the residents of Himachal Pradesh. This is the largest religious *mela* in the State.

Some of the other religious fairs are Markand fair known as *Baisakhi* fair, Guga fair at Gherwin lasting for eight days and Bharnot fair at Bharnot village where a stone image known as *Devta* is worshipped by the pilgrims. Once women only had the privilege of worship of the *Devta* at Bharnot village and to have the *Baisakhi* bath at village Gangnon in Bachhretu Pargana. The temple of Siva is the attraction. The *mela* is ancient. It is said that even in summer a bath at the tank makes the man shiver, so cold is the water.

“The Bada Dev fair has a legend. About five thousand years ago, so the tradition holds, Pandawas lived in Hastinapur. Once they were in exile, and wandered in parts of Himachal Pradesh. There are places where these Pandawas are said and believed to have taken shelter or rest. One of such places is Bari-ki-Dhar (Bari hill). Villages of Sanog, Buila and Deothal, all situated in the Arki tahsil, were also, it is said, visited by them and there are temples still extant. It is believed that on the Bari hill is the statue of Yudhishtira, in village Sanog that of Arjuna, in village Buila that of Nakula and in village Deothal that of Sahdev. Bhim Sen, out of some anger, went away after, it is said slapping the deity in a fit of rage deforming her face. Her statue exists in the temple at the crest too. Puja is held daily and thousands of people visit these places at the top of Bari hill, attended by people coming from far-flung areas specially from Bilaspur, Arki, Dhami, Kuthar and Hindur. Songs are sung in the praise of the deities and offerings are also made. Idols from villages Sanog, Buila and Deothal are brought in the litter preceded by local band consisting of drums and other instruments like harsingha and conch. On arrival on the hill the idols are placed in the temple where the four brothers are regarded to be meeti g.

Several goats are slaughtered. By the evening, deities repair to their respective places.”*

Bheanoo Pir, a Pir about whom very little is known is commemorated by a fair over two days at Guddo village. There is a collection of about 1,000 persons,. The *Pirsthan* is usually resorted to for preventing cattle diseases.

The Guga Naumi fair at Nagraon collects thousands of believers, Hindus and Muslims.

“During the month of Bhadon the famous fair of Guga Naumi is held at Nagraon in tahsil Ghamarwin. From first to the eighth day of Bhadon parties of singers go from house to house singing episode of Guga for which they get grains, from the villagers.

Generally the parties comprise scheduled-castes. They carry ‘Guga emblem’. The emblem is an iron rod with its head shaped like the head of a snake. *Maulis* (red yarn) are tied to the emblem. The emblem is worshipped with incense in the morning before a party sets out for singing. A person holds an hour-glass drum in hand, another or two may carry *thalis* (plates) and beat them with light stick. This constitutes the orchestra to accompany the songs of Guga. On the last day i.e. the day of Guga *naumi* the songs are sung on the *than* (seat) of Guga at Nagraon. About five hundred persons assemble in the fair for a day. There is a temple where people offer grain and coins, before Guga image and the offerings are taken by the priests. Wrestling matches highlight this fair wherein the winning wrestlers are rewarded.”**

It may be observed here that the sense of religiosity has been deepened by the presence of a large percentage of high-caste Hindus, Brahmins and Rajputs. There are two main branches of the Brahmins, the Shuklas and the Krishans. The Sasani Shukla Brahmins are more exclusive and orthodox and form the priestly class. They mostly hold land free of revenue and they do not intermarry with any of the other Brahmins.

* District Gazetteer of Bilaspur (1975) page 128.

** District Gazetteer of Bilaspur (1975) page 130.

The priestly Brahmins refrain from the actual ploughing of the lands. Though not Sanskritists some of them know the appropriate Sanskrit *mantras* for the *Pujas*. The Rajputs are a martial section and opt for the Army or the Police. They have an aristocracy of their own and ascribe their lineage always to some Raja. Some Rajputs do not touch the plough but the Kanait Rajputs who predominate in number do. The continuous rule of the Chandravanshi Princes had sustained the temples, religious fairs and the pilgrim centres. The *puja-bidhis* are more *shastrik* (conventional) and follow the traditional techniques unlike the mixed ways of *puja* in Kinnaur districts where Brahmin priests are rare.

Devotional dances and *Kirtans* with the accompaniment of music are common. *Ras* dance parties from within and outside the district regale the religious congregations with episodes of Krishna and Radha alongwith *gopinis*. There is no sex-slant. *Kathas* are often held and legends of Raja Harish Chandra, Prahlad etc. are recited. There are also attempts to stage the stories. *Ramlila* parties are much patronised. *Ramayana*, *Mahabharat* and *Shreemad Bhagwat* are often read out to the devotees. The princely State used to appoint its own *Kathakars* and preachers. The princely State also used to spend some money in maintaining the temples. Free endowments of lands were given to the temples and the priests. With the development of communications the religious centres have been made more accessible and comfortable for a stay, for the outsider particularly.

But with all the temples and religious practices it should not be presumed that the people have no superstitions and belief in supernatural powers, benevolent or malevolent. The people of Bilaspur district have a typical Pahari culture where the inner religious sense of the man is tinged with omens, belief in superstitions etc. Throughout the district Tuesdays are held auspicious for undertaking any work because Raja Ali Dev of Chanderi won the area on that day. Ali Dev has also been deified now and is propitiated on the first Tuesday of

the month. The *Bhoot* or the evil spirit has to be appeased with proper homages including the sacrifice of a goat or a cock. It is a common belief that if the cattle have an epidemic or the family is faced with some domestic troubles, if any project taken up goes awry leading to loss and there is any lingering illness in the family some evil spirit has been the cause and the malevolent spirit has to be won over. It is commonly held that evil spirits take possession of the body and have to be exorcised. The Bilaspuri believes that *Khot* or vice brings in sudden illness or difficulties. By means of grains of wheat and some *Kriyas* (acts) an experienced man can find out which deity has been angry and the afflicted man has to take a vow to offer *Puja* to that particular deity. This process to find out *Khot* is known as *Akhwan*.

TEMPLES AND LEGENDS OF KINNAUR

The Chini tahsil of Mahasu district was made an independent district from May 1, 1960 and came to be known as Kinnaur district. This is one of the smallest districts in India with an area of 6,520 Sq. metres and a population of less than 50,000 persons. The District Headquarters Kalpa at a distance of 260 kilometres from Simla, the capital of Himachal Pradesh is connected by a motorable road, has a population of less than 1500 persons. Any ordinary village in populated Uttar Pradesh or Bihar States has a higher population than the District Headquarters. There are various dialects besides Kinnauri.

The district has on the Eastern boundary Western Tibet, now a part of China. The Southern boundary adjoins Uttar Kashi districts of Uttar Pradesh and the Rohru tahsil of Mahasu district in Himachal Pradesh. The Western boundary has part of Mahasu and Kulu districts of Himachal Pradesh. The Northern boundary adjoins the Spiti Sub Division of Lahul and Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh. The international borders, the great snowy mountains including the legendary Kailash, deep forests, rivers remaining snow-bound for a considerable part of the year, the passes, crags, meandering bridle paths which often lose their identity, the intensely cold climate, the variegated culture-complex of the people with strong influence of Buddhism, (that phase of Buddhism which has come to be known more as Lamaism) and Hinduism diluted with a strong element of Animism, superstitions, belief in ghosts, the avifauna, the fauna, the different species of trees, fruits and flowers make the district extremely interesting. This area where the villages are scattered with an extremely small population, at times dwindling to about 200 persons was a challenge for efficient administration and that is why a separate district was carved out in 1960. The people of the district have different strains of culture and polyandry is still prevalent with strange marriage customs

and civil rights of the women. The Succession Act, 1956 is not applicable to Kinnaur and the daughters do not inherit any property legally.

The villages are few and far between with a very small population but almost every village has a village godling. The district has some big and ancient Buddhist and Hindu temples. Besides, stones of various types, hill tops and dangerous crags are also worshipped. The legends associated with the temples, gods, goddesses and godlings are legion. In this district holymen and saints are quickly deified. There are Tibetan gods, manifestations of Buddha and Hindu gods and goddesses, godlings besides a legion of spirits and ghosts that are worshipped. Lamaism as prevalent in Tibet has a strong grip on the people of Kinnaur and naturally the people believe in an endless stream of incarnations of the godmen (Lamas) who are looked upto as almost gods. All this has given to almost every village in Kinnaur a particular *Devta*. Both the Lama and a Brahmin act there as the priest. Divination by a sheet of 50 picture cards is unique in this district. The ruling family of Bushahr in the tahsil before the district came into being was held to be of divine origin. Each Raja of Bushahr after death was supposed to be reincarnated as the *Guru-Lama* understood to be the *Dalai Lama*. An important incarnation for the Buddhists of Kinnaur is known as Locharimbochhe and when a particular Locharimbochhe dies another has to be identified by the *Dalai Lama*. The recently published District Gazetteer of Kinnaur mentions :—

“Kinnaur district, especially the Hangrang valley has had the good fortune of a Locharimbochhe born at Sumra who died some years back. He used to live at Kee *gunfa* in the Spiti valley of Lahul and Spiti district. After his death, according to the custom, his deputy called Changjad, went to the *Dalai Lama* and requested him to identify the new Locharimbochhe. The *Dalai Lama* revealed that a boy born in a Rajput family of village Shyalkhar was the new Locharimbochhe. The newly discovered Locharimbochhe lived only for four years. Again the Changjad went to the *Dalai*

Lama to find out the next Locharimbochhe. The *Dalai Lama* informed the deputy that the next Locharimbochhe will be born in the same house, and of the same parents from whom the former Locharimbochhe had been born. After three days of the death of the previous Locharimbochhe, a boy was born to the same parents. The Changjad located the child and deputed a person to look after him in his parent's house, and himself went back to the Kee *gunfa*. The man appointed to look after the young lama continues to tutor the boy for being ordained as the next Locharimbochhe. This young Locharimbochhe was visited in that village by the Sub-Editor and staff of the District Gazetteers in 1964. As soon as the staff bowed their heads before the child, he gracefully placed his tiny hand over their heads as a mark of blessing them. The child appeared to be a promising and of uncommon intelligence among the children of that age in Shyalkhar. He has a golden complexion, large impressive eyes and flawless limbs. He had not till then been named and was generally not allowed to mix up with the boys of his age probably to keep him neat and clean, as the teacher said. He is provided with food cooked exclusively for him. The menu happens to be the same as that for his parents.

The religion of the mass of the inhabitants is Hinduism, but they have no minute distinctions of caste. There are only two main castes, the Rajputs or the non-Scheduled Caste and, Chamangs and Domangs, the scheduled ones. Broadly speaking, religious life here is very much what it is in the adjoining parts of the Mahasu district, except that the influence of the Lamas (more pronounced in upper parts), is greater than that of the Brahmans. The most notable of the Kinnaur deities out of the pale of Lamaism is Chandika.

As regards the Buddhism or the Lamaism as is prevalent in Tibet, the cardinal tenet is the endless reincarnation of the divine leader in a series of deified men or lamas. The number of Tibetan gods is said to be a legion.

In Kinnaur too every village and every pargana has its own devta. A Lama acts as the family priest like the Brahmin elsewhere, and even more. Like the Brahmins elsewhere he too is consulted in times of trouble and asked to diagnose the origin of any misfortune which may occur in a family. If, as is usual, he traces this to any *bhut* (spirit) or devta suitable means of propitiation are adopted."**

As mentioned besides a large number of better known Hindu and Buddhist temples there are any number of village *Devatas* in the shape of stones etc. At places there were human sacrifices common at one time. At Kamru village there is a temple of Bhim Kali where human sacrifices were definitely offered at one time. Vague stories are current about occasional human sacrifice at other temples also but they are now abolished. Horns of some domestic and wild animals are taken to be sacred. Almost every top of the hill is held sacred and anyone passing must throw a stone or tie a piece of cloth somewhere. The portion of Kailash known as Raldang Kailash is taken to be the home of Lord Siva and his consort Uma or Parvati the daughter of the Himalayas. Oath taken in the name of some supernatural force is known as *Darohi* and a *Darohi* has a tremendous impact. There is a peculiar institution in this district. Almost every important deity, Buddhist or Hindu or Animist has a man attached known as *Grokech* (mouth piece). He is supposed to know by heart the legend about the origin of the deity. He recites the legend and gets into a trance and his services are often taken for appeasing or avoiding a distress. This recital is known as *Chironing*.

Before mentioning the temples and legends it may be observed that there are quite a number of well defined Hindu cults and a lot of miscellaneous Hindu cults which are rather elastic in import but have a tremendous influence at the particular villages that believe in them. The three important Hindu cults are Devi or Kali, Siva and Vishnu. The important Devi or Kali cult temples are Bhagwati temple at

** *District Gazetteer of Kinnaur*, (1971), page 81-82.

Rakchham, Bhimakali temple at Kamru and Mathi at Chhitkul in Sangla tahsil; Chandika temple at Kothi in Kalpa tahsil; Chandika temple at Ropa, Khandma temple at Kanam, Khurmo Devi temple at Spilo in Puh tahsil; Chiterlekha at Taranda, Hirma Devi temple at Chauhra, Ukha Devi temple at Bara Kamba and Ukha Devi temple at Nachar in Nachar tahsil and Kali temple at Chuling in Hangrang sub-tahsil.

The important Siva cult temples are at Mahasu, at Telangi and Parka Shankras at Pawari in Kalpa tahsil; Maheshras temple at Chagaon, at Gramang or Katgaon, at Sungra or Grosnam in Nachar tahsil and Rupak Shankras at Thangi in Morang tahsil.

Of the Vishnu cult temples mention may be made of Badri Nath at Kamru or Mone, Badri Narayan at Batseri, Narenas at Chasu, at Kalba, at Shaung in Sangla tahsil; Kuldeo Narayan at Namgya in Puh tahsil; Kumshoo Narayan at Bei (pargana Bhabha), at Kafnu (pargana Bhabha), Narenas at Chagaon, at Gramang at Sungra and at Urni in Nachar tahsil; Narenas at Asrang and Tegtashoo (Narayan) temple at Lipa in Morang tahsil; and Narenas at Chini in Kalpa tahsil.

About the miscellaneous cults we may briefly mention Dabla, Deodam, Gyalbo, Kuldeo, Nag, Naidak, Pathoro, and Yulsa; The sacred temples to these cults are as follows :—

Dabla Cult

Dabla at Chango and at Hango in Hangrang sub-tahsil; and at Dabling, Dubling, Kanam, Namgya, Shyaso and Spuwa in Puh tahsil.

Deodum-Cult

Deodum at Chuling, Hango and Nako (pargana Shuwa) in Hangrang sub-tahsil; at Kanam and Spilo in Puh Tahsil.

Gyalbo Cult

Gyalbo at Hango and Shyalkhar in Hangrang and sub-tahsil.

Kuldeo Cult

Kuldeo at Dutrang (pargana Bhabha) and Gharshu in Nachar tahsil.

Nag Cult

Dharang Nag at Yangpa, Nages at Kandar, Natpa, Yula, Nagin at Bari and Chhota Kamba in Nachar tahsil; Nages at Barang and Mebar in Kapla Tahsil; Nages at Barua, Chasu, Rakchham, Sangla and Sapni in Sangla tahsil; and Rapang Nages at Asrang and Nagin at Asrang in Morang tahsil.

Naidak Cult

Naidak at Chuling and Hango in Hangrang sub-tahsil.

Pathoro Cult

Pathoro at Punang (pargana Rajgram) and Rarang in Morang tahsil.

Yulsa Cult

Yulsa at Chango and Shylkhar in Hangrang sub-tahsil and at Sangnam in Puh Tahsil.

Miscellaneous Cults and their temples.

Basheshras at Pilu, Bashchru at Namgya, Chhakoling Dumber at Labrang, Chola at Namgya and Tungma Dumber (replaced by Swami) at Giabong in Puh tahsil; Bhairon at Kothi, Chornce at Miru, Markaling at Khawangi, Sheshering at Pangi in Kalpa tahsil; Durjichimbo at Sumra, Jamato at Leo, Kumshoo at Hango, Pale at Hango, Puiguel at Nako and Shungma at Shyalkhar in Hangrang sub-tahsil; Gyangmagyum at Jangi, Kasurajas at Rirang or Ribba, Kulyo at Rispa, Milakyum at Akpa, Shangchi-Kyung at Nesang and Urmig at Morang in Morang tahsil, Shanshras at Rakchham in Sangla tahsil and Teras at Rupi in Nachar tahsil.**

This panorama of temples of different cults satisfy the intense religiosity of the people of Kinnaur district. As indicated before they are between Lamaism and its various debased manifestations merging into superstitions and

** *District Gazetteer of Kinnaur* (1971), page 369-370.

Hinduism where priests and true interpretations are rare and superstitions more and also oppressed with the idea of a world of ghosts. The economic stagnation of the people, the long chilly evenings in winter months when outside physical activities are impossible, keen wrangle for physical survival, prevalence of diseases which hardly could be mitigated by a few *Vaids* scattered here and there, wild animals, risky outings could explain why the Kinnauris try to make up the large gap by belief in so many cults, deities, ghosts, and superstitions and worship in so many temples.

Along with temples, legends multiply. The lush coniferous forests, the snowy peaks, the meandering rivers which suddenly become swollen and rush, the beautiful birds and the variety of animals, the proximity of Tibet and some of the lesser developed areas of India on the border have helped the growth of legends, some of which are of Hindu origin, some Buddhist and some of probably pure fantasy.

Some legends have grown out of the particular location of the village. For example Chango, a mere collection of four hamlets on the left bank of Spiti river is a big alluvial plain, barricaded on every side by lofty hills has its story of origin. A very look at the village suggests that it was a vast lake before. The four hundred and odd villagers work hard in autumn and can only sing and dance, amuse themselves as best as they can during long wintry months of the year and repeat the legend of the origin of the village. In days long forgotten a Lama in the court of the Raja of Tibet named Changla accompanied the Raja on a pilgrimage and came to this very spot. The flat piece of land girted by hills all around fascinated Changla and he wanted to settle down there. The Raja was not willing and the party returned to Tibet. Sometime after Changla had a dream and the vast alluvial plain beckoned again and again promising fertility and prosperous crops. The Raja was superstitious and thought that he should now allow Changla to go and try his fortune there. Changla came and named the village after him which was abbreviated into Chango. Naturally the villagers think there is divinity behind the origin of the

village and are under the influence of Lamaism but few village godlings namely Gyalbo, Dabla and Yulsa are there. These village deities or Gramya Devtas have no temple but they have their spokesmen, who would go into a trance when occasion demands and act as sooth-sayer, disease-diviner and also the medicine man. Another rather inaccessible village Chhitkul in Sangla tahsil, the last and highest village in the Baspa valley has a local goddess Mathi with three temples. Mathi is more than a village god. The main temple is said to be about five hundred years old built by a resident of Garhwal. The Goddess is on a square ark made of walnut wood covered with clothes and decorated by a tuft of the tail of yak, a very useful animal for the villagers. Two poles called *Bayangas* are inserted and the goddess is carried out at times. It is said the goddess had started from Brindavan and via Mathura and Badrinath had reached Tibet. From there she came down to Garhwal and ultimately came to this area via Sirmur, previously a small princely State. Here the deity found the territory divided into seven parts. She appointed her relatives including her husband as guards for particular areas. The husband Badrinath was put as a guard of the throne of Bushahr. Finally she settled at Chhitkul and took over a supervisory role of the seven divisions. She is worshipped with the water of the nearby spring. A simple legend out of simplistic ideas, it has a tremendous hold on the people of the village and the neighbourhood. Kamru village with about a little more than one thousand souls has a single storey temple dedicated to Badrinath who had been deputed there by goddess Mathi to look after the Bushahr *gaddi*. The rulers of Bushahr used to have a ceremonial enthronement at this temple. There is also an idol of Kamakhya Devi. There is a deep well nearby where it is said prisoners use to be lowered with a rope and condemned to live there.

The Bhim Kali temple at Kamru is supposed to have averted several attacks of the Tibetans to reduce the Raja to submission. Human sacrifice was once common. It is said that a man was well fed and supplied with liquor liberally for seven days and on the eighth day he was sacrificed.

The District Gazetteer mentions another legend associated with the Bhim Kali deity of Kamru. It is mentioned "The deity in her form of Parvati, the mountain goddess is propitiated and held in high esteem by the prince and peasant alike. To win her favour and placate her wrath, the people leave nothing untried and no sacrifice is considered great. As such, some significant ceremonies were performed, whenever the raja paid a visit to Kamru. He was carried in a palanquin, preceded by musicians and state officials, and escorted by his subjects. As the procession drew near the ridge whence Kali's home burst on the vision, a halt was called. While still sheltered from her eyes and those of her sentinels the raja descended from his palanquin, doffed robes, ornaments and head-dress, instead, to enable the mathes of Sapni, a village nearby, attired himself in raja's dress, while the raja donned inconspicuous garments of grey. A priest waved a vessel of holy water round his head and then poured its contents over the mathes' head. Then the latter was borne in the royal palanquin, and treated like the raja, who himself walked in the crowd until the procession entered the fort. He then resumed his dignities, but the robes and ornaments worn by the mathes became his perquisite. He (mathes) was then sacrificed within the fort, and his acquisitions fell to his heirs. He was called the *raja-ki-bali*.

On one occasion when the heir-apparent visited Kamru, the old rites were all observed, but the water was poured on the hands of mathes, instead of on his head; and the man who then took the part declared that he was the first of his family to survive the ordeal by a year. As late as the middle of the last century no act of state was performed without the approval of Bhimkali, who was regarded as the ruler of the land, she having granted, the regency to the raja's ancestor six score generations ago, just as she had conferred the hereditary priesthood to the senior branch of his family."**

At village Kilbar also in tahsil Sangla the local deity is Kilbala after whom the village is named. There is another

** District Gazetteer of Kinnaur, 1971.

deity Narenas on an arch with twenty masks, of various metals including one in gold. Villagers in every household have to contribute a quantity of grain to the deity and this levy is known a *Kutange*. Worship is offered twice daily. There is a devotee who acts as the mouthpiece. The mouthpiece is to speak on behalf of the deity whenever he is supposed to be seized by the supernatural spirit or invoked by the people or even otherwise. When he is in a frenzied stage, he narrates what is called a *Chironing*, briefly explaining the emergence and exploits of the deity on behalf of whom he speaks and then gives the decree. Now this *Chironing* or recital about the deity is almost a sanctified institution in this part. But for various reasons mouthpieces and *Chironings* are declining as fresh recruits are not easily available.

Near Kalpa, the District Headquarters, is a village Kothi overshadowed by the peak of Kinnaur Kailash mountain. It has an attractive temple dedicated to the goddess Chandika, more popular as Shuwang Chandika after the name of the pargana Shuwa. There is an image of gold erected in an arch and this deity is danced up and down by four persons at the time of worship. This peculiar procedure of worship is evolved by the villagers. There is no Brahmin Priest. Peculiarly enough nearby there is an ancient temple of *Bhairon* decaying in neglect. *Bhairon* is taken to be a manifestation of Lord Siva and it is intriguing that just under the shadow of the great Kinnar Kailash Mountain the abode of Siva the icon of a manifestation of Siva is left neglected.

The village Morang at a distance of about 262 kilometres from Simla on the left bank of the Sutlaj river has a local deity, *Urmig*. There are three structures dedicated to this deity which are empty. The ark of this deity remains in the old fort at the village believed to be built by the *Pandavas*. The fort has a square structure and its main gate is approachable by a detached ladder. From this fort the sacred ark is taken out on auspicious days. The ark contains eighteen *mukhas* of silver, a little gold and brass. The eighteen *mukhas* are said to represent the eighteen days of the great epic of Mahabharata. Animal sacrifices were very common till



A Buddhist Lama at Prayer, Kalpa (Courtesy: H. P. Govt.).

a few decades back. This deity has also a mouthpiece who utters *chironing*. The legend of this deity is that it was once human and in a fight Urmig killed his opponent Dharam Chand and established his rule. In a fair held in the month of *Vaisakha* there used to be a procession headed by the deity and followed by a *biar* in memory of the victory of Urmig over Dharam Chand. This fair is no longer held.

Another local deity Ukha goddess is located in a temple at village Nachar of a tahsil of the same name about 208 kilometres from Simla on the old Hindustan Tibet road. Nachar is now the headquarters of a sub-division and has beautiful sceneries with less than 2000 population. Animals like bear, goral, and antelope abound. The temple of Ukha has a remarkable large gate with a wooden door mounted by a plate of brass on which various deities are depicted. Ukha is said to be Usha (Dawn). It is said that Usha was utilised by Indra to break the *tapashya* (Meditation) of Ahan a sage who worshipped Brahma for one million year and acquired tremendous spiritual power. Usha was sent by Indra to disturb Ahan who created the Sun and Usha had to disappear at the advent of the Sun. Indra continued sending Usha after Usha. But eventually the weaker side of Ahan was separated from the saintly side and was called *Vahan* i.e. the chariot of Asur. The desire in Ahan named Banasur, a separate entity took the shape of another man and eventually married Usha. It is also said that in a moment of righteous indignation Banasur cut off his own head in front of Usha or Ukha and so a temple was raised to Usha. Banasur could not become a god for committing a suicide. This deity has also a mouthpiece and the mouthpiece in trance gives out *Chironing* with fierce gestures and postures.

Some of the godlings have temples with declining prestige. Nabo village said to have been set up by one Nab in the service of a Raja of Tibet in the midst of beautiful Hangrang valley, has the village deity Deodom and several other idols in a temple. Prayer wheels are kept in other structures and water is offered in seven cups every night. Namgya village in pargana Shua on the left bank of Sutlaj river has four local

godlings Dabla, Chola, Bushahru, Kuldeo Narain. The village Puh in pargana Shua has also the local deity Dabla but without any temple. The small idol is adorned with yak-tail-hair and long pieces of coloured cloth. The entire piece is called *Fobrang*. The village Sangrang also in pargana Shua has the village deity Yulsa in a temple. There is an ark with a dozen marks for the deity and the deity is taken out to houses of illness or where a son is born. Animal sacrifice to this deity has been abandoned. These local deities appear to be fading out. Some of them are Buddhist in origin and some Hindu.

Nages another local deity is located at village Sapni in pargana Rajgram, tahsil Sangle. The deity has thirty-four masks. In the worship incense is burnt, eight lamps are lit and flowers and water are offered. Puja is offered twice daily. The masks are stowed away when no worship is performed. Animal sacrifice is not prevalent here. Once in a fortnight a worship is offered to Kali or to Kailash on behalf of Nages.

Besides the regular temples, there are a number of other structures which are held sacred in Kinnaur and most of them are connected with Lamaism. It may be mentioned here that almost all the earlier writers of the travelogues of the area ⁽¹⁾** have mentioned that Buddhism or Lamaism had the bigger hold on this area. This does not appear to be unfounded and is probably due to the fact that the Buddhist Lamas were frequently visiting the area from Tibet side and the Hindu Brahmin Priests were almost absent. As a matter of fact even now there are very few of Brahmins.

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1. ** 1. Wilson, Andrew, *Abode of Snow*.
 2. Gerard, A., *An account of Koonawur in the Himalaya*.
 3. Gerard, Lloyd William Alexander, *Narrative of a journey from Caunpoor to the Boorendo Pass in the Himalay Mountains*.
 4. *Punjab State Gazetteer, Simla Hill States*, 1910.
 5. Hutton, Thomas Lieut., *Journal of a State tour Kanawur, Hungrung, and Spiti*, 1838.
 6. Fraser, James Baillie, *Journal of a Tour through part of the Snowy Range of the Himalay Mountain, and to the sources of the rivers Jamna and Ganges*, 1820.

There are any number of septs of Kanaites or Rajputs, but very few of Brahmins. Fraser did not find any Brahmins and observed that "No Brahmins have ever settled in this district nor will they go there; perhaps the poverty of the country, and the privations necessarily to be suffered during residences there, have deterred these holy men, who usually seem to prefer those places which afford them all the comforts of life Edward Thornton (?)** observed," The religion of Koonawur is Brahminism in the south; in the north, Lamaic Buddhism; in the middle, a mixture of the two systems.

There prevails a regularly graduated transition from one to the other. Thus, Brahmins are not met with beyond Saharun, near the southern boundary, where they officiate at the shrine of the sanguinary female divinity Bhima Kali, to whom, at no remote period, they offered human sacrifices. At Kanum, about, half-way between the northern and southern frontiers, the sacred books are in Tibet, and Lamas are there first met with; but kine are venerated, and some attention paid to the distinction of castes; thus partially amalgamating the two creeds. At Humgrung, on the northern frontier, the religion is pure Lamaic Buddhism....."

Hinduism did exist from before as the very area is taken to be the abode of Lord Siva and his spouse Parvati or Uma or Durga. Mythological legends associate this area with the Kinnars or Kimpurushas (what kind of human beings?). It may be mentioned here that from time immemorial Kinnars or Kinnars have been mentioned in almost every ancient book of religion of Hindus. Ajanta Frescoes have made the Kinnars immortal. But the Hindu priests being rare, Lamaism did spread later. That is why though Hindus predominate (90%) Buddhism has been peacefully flourishing there.

Many village entrances have got very old small walls of stones with the inscription "*OM MANE PADME HUM*". These sacred stones are vaguely described as *Mane* and they are very common. The *Mane* has to be kept on the right hand

2. ** Thornton, Edward, *A Gazetteer of the Territories under the Government of the East India Company, and of the Native States on the continent of India.*

while passing. *Chosten* and *Donktens* are very small structures dedicated to god or the evil spirits. Almost every village has one *Labrang* (a place of worship). *Lopchas* (square piece of stones on the tops of the houses), *Darchhot* (a pole erected at one corner of the house to which a flag is attached printed with "OM MANE PADME HUM" and *Dumgyars* (a large praying wheel) are common.

Another sacred structure *Kankani* is peculiar to this area. The District Gazetteer of Kinnaur, 1971, mentions :—

"At Sangnam there are three cylinders kept constantly in motion through water, on the same principle as the wheels of a water-mill. At Nesang several such cylinders are rotated by the wind. These are used for the purposes of devotion, and a person while passing by generally gives it a twirl, whispering OM MANE PADME HUM. *Kankani* resembles what may be called an arch or a gate erected on a common path in a village and is decorated with paintings. It is built on two side walls topped by a cupola. Below the cupola, in the ceiling, are elegantly painted numerous figures of Buddhist deities. The idea behind erecting a *Kankani* seems to be that anyone passing underneath it should feel the omnipresence of Lord Buddha. One who causes to build a *Kankani* cherishes the hope that the passerby being reminded of Lord Buddha will acquire *pun* (a good-will) in which the builder will automatically get a share. A believer in Buddhism while passing under a *Kankani* takes off his headgear in token of veneration to the Lord."**

Coming to the festivals the Gazetteer of the District mentions 360 of them and almost all of them are associated with some phase of Hinduism or Buddhism, or one of the minor Gods. Some of them are local for one, two or more villages but some are observed throughout Kinnaur. An example is *Raskayang* in the month of *Jyaistha* (May-June) *Buddha*

** District Gazetteer of Kinnaur of 1971, page 80.

Purnima in May-June is also observed almost throughout the district. Almost every *Amawas* is a sacred day. *Holi* is a day of festivity throughout the district.

A beautiful area like Kinnaur with temples and legends has unfortunately no connected history till very late in the 16th century. The *Chironings* by the *Grokch* of the deities mentioned earlier have references to ancient regional history but from them it is difficult to get a connected story. Even the Settlement Report of 1928 mentions the legend of Banasur as below :—

“This part was under the *devtas* (gods and semi-gods) and last in the line was one *Banasur* who had become very powerful all over Bushahr. A battle was fought some six thousand years ago between Lord Krishna and Banasur in which Raja Banasur, along with his three sons, was killed. Lord Krishna then made Parduman Singh, his (Lord Krishna's) grandson, the ruler of the place. Apparently there are serious discrepancies in this story. According to the story given in the epics, Banasur was not killed as he was a descendant of Prahlad to whom Vishnu, of whom Lord Krishna was the incarnate, had held a promise (boon) that he would not exterminate the race of Prahlad. What actually could have happened was that *Banasur's* pride was humbled and on his recognising the Almighty Vishnu in Lord Krishna, *Banasur* surrendered, and, leaving the kingdom to Parduman Singh, took to saintly life.”

In spite of large-scale migrations of the local population in winter season with their flocks of animals to the lower parts of Himachal and their return at the start of summer season—the temples and the deities have not been, fortunately, tampered with so far and there has been no vandalism. The temples are also free from the influence of eroticism. Walnut wood has largely been used in the temples for doors. The carvings and the very few fresco paintings have their own beauty but not of a very superior attraction. There is a re-

markable Buddhist *Chorten* at Spilo. Another remarkable feature is that we do not find the fearsome *Dvarpals*, or the *Yaksha* as common as in the temples in Nepal. The *Mithuna* images so common in Nepal are absent. We do not also find that galaxy of high tantricised images (Tara, Manjusri, Hariti, Avalokiteswar or crowned Buddha or Buddha in different poses) as common as in Nepal. Though so close Tibet does not appear to have had that big impact on the temples of this area that she has stimulated in Nepal.

LAHUL AND SPITI—WHERE BUDDHISM MEETS HINDUISM

Lahul and Spiti created as two civil sub-divisions with an area of 12,210 sq. km. and a population of 23,538 persons according to 1971 census, was made into a district in 1960. The density of population works out at about 2 per sq. km. now. The entire population is rural.

From 1846 to 1914 after the area came under the British, Lahul-Spiti was a part of Kulu sub-division of Kangra district. It may be mentioned here that the original Kangra district under the British has now been divided between present Kangra, Kulu, Una, Hamirpur, Lahul and Spiti and Kangra districts of Himachal Pradesh. In 1941, a separate sub-tahsil was made comprising of Lahul and Spiti areas. That was the nucleus of the district made in 1960. The district headquarters is at Keylong. Kaza is the headquarters of Spiti sub-division with a population of a little above 300 souls. Though small in area and population the district has its importance in India being a significant frontier district.

The district which has Tibet on the Eastern border, Ladakh district of Jammu and Kashmir to its North and Chamba and Kulu districts of Himachal Pradesh on the West and the South respectively is unique for various reasons—topography, people, colourful and with an indigenous culture-complex, the incidence of the two religious systems of Hinduism and Buddhism coalescing with each other, fading mythical, legendary and historical associations etc. The meandering rivers Chandra, Bhaga, etc., all have a sacred entity to the inhabitants as the rivers are the only means for irrigating their very small uneconomic holdings. They become violent torrents in a particular season while in winter they freeze. Gods are taken to reside at particular banks of the rivers and where ancient bridges exist. The snow-fields, glaciers, ice-caves, numerous mountain peaks, valleys are other features. In spite

of some fauna and flora of unusual specimens and all the characteristics the area is rightly described as a mountain desert.

The Hindus slightly outnumber the Buddhists. The males outnumber the females. There is a sprinkling of Muslims, Sikhs and men of other religions particularly due to immigration after the district was created in 1960. Lahul sub-division has more of the Hindus while in the Spiti sub-division Buddhism preponderates. But for all practical purposes the two faiths have coalesced and together have eroded the previous Animism and deep faith in the Evil and malignant Spirits lurking almost everywhere—trees, stones, peaks and river-banks.

The most important Buddhist monastery in the Lahul sub-division is that of Kardang on the left side of the Bhaga river opposite Keylong. This is a remarkable monastery with a large number of images, paintings, *thankas*, prayer-wheels etc. The monastery was built in the 12th century and re-built by one Norbu Lama at the beginning of the current century. Norbu Lama, a man of Kardang village toured a lot and acquired a deep knowledge of Buddhist scriptures. On return he renovated the monastery and devoted himself to the spread of Buddhism.

The valuable paintings of various types, weapons, musical instruments, masks, images of Buddha and other divinities, the library of Buddhist scriptures should offer a rich field for research. For the average visitor the following description will be of interest :—

“A narrow path, shaded by willow trees, and then a steep ascent leads to the monastery. The flat roofed, three storeyed houses are massed together, in two blocks, so as to enable flow of under-communications in winter. In the vicinity of the monastery is a silver coated *chorten*.* In the portico is a row of prayer cylinders. There are four chapels in the monastery one of which contains the

* A *Chorten* is usually an edifice with a square base made often of super-imposed steps with cupola topped by a number of round discs held together by a central axis which keeps them suspended. Whether any relics are there or not, Chortens are held in great veneration (P.C.R.C.).



Buddha Image At Kalpa (Courtesy: H. P. Govt.)

ashes of Lama Narbhu Rimpoche, who established the monastery. The walls are decorated with colourful paintings without any affinity with Basohli paintings. A tantric painting depicting two figures, a male and a female engaged in ecstatic union, decorates the wall. Brass images are ranged on shelves on one side of the altar and on the other stands a book-case full of sacred books. Cylindrical prayer wheels, which spin round at a slight touch of the finger, are placed on each side of the altar. In the centre of another chapel is an image of Triloki Nath, with eleven heads and one thousand hands. It has a benign expression. The walls are painted with figures of the incarnations of Buddha and other saints. Paintings of male and female divinities, saints and demons painted in brilliant blue and red, on cloth with silk borders are hung on the walls.”**

Unfortunately there is a certain amount of allergy on the part of the Buddhist Lamas who are in-charge of this and other monasteries for a systematic study by others and this has stood on the way to a proper appraisal of the magnificence of these treasures in the monasteries.

Buddhism apparently came to the Western Himalayas in the time of Asoka in 3rd century B.C. as evident from the rock edicts of Kalsi. The great Buddhist saint and scholar Padmasambhava, preached Buddhism in this area in the 9th century. That form of Buddhism known as Lamaism came down from Tibet a little later. The Lamaism in this area has not eschewed the belief and worship of the malevolent spirits supposed to be dwelling in trees, rocks, hill-tops, difficult crevices etc. Neither Lamaism nor the more orthodox form of Buddhism has been able to do away with the sacrifice of sheep and goats to appease the evil Spirits. The administrators have been in some difficulties even in the planting of new trees or the laying of new sources of irrigation or the repairing and re-aligning old water ways because of time-honoured superstitions.

** *District Gazetteer of Lahul and Spiti* (1975), page 32.

Throughout the district and particularly in Spiti sub-division the people literally live in their abiding faith in Buddhism and a part and parcel of them is the utterance of "OM MANE PADME HUM". Mr. M.D. Mangain the Editor of the District Gazetteer who has toured personally the area carefully writes :—

"Om Mane Padme Hum" is a sacred utterance. Its repetition, conscious or unconscious, vocal, manual or mechanical is the panacea for all ills. It washes away all sins. The Spitial utters the words as he wakes up in the morning; he repeats the *mantra* when he is telling over his head; he inscribes them on copper or silver wheel, and spins the sacred words round and round in the clockwise direction; he paints them on a small or a large drum, and makes the drum rotate on its axis; he carves them on a stone slab and leaves them to mingle with the chorus of a thousand other slabs; he prints them on a piece of cloth and lets it flutter in the wind, so that with every flutter his prayer goes up to heaven. Sometimes he fastens the prayer drum to a mechanical contrivance such as a water or a wind mill, and lets the forces of nature play for his benefit."**

There are mainly eighteen monasteries in Lahul and the more important ones are Guru-Ghantal, Kardang, Shashur, and Tayul. People consider it a sacred rite to go around (*parikrama*) of the Dilbari Mountain situated above the Guru-Ghantal monastery. As mentioned in the District Gazetteer of Lahul and Spiti, (1975) :—

"Guru Ghantal is the oldest monastery established by Padmasambhava. It is more than 800 years old and contains wooden idols as distinguished from the clay idols which are common in the monasteries of Lahul and which were introduced by Latsawa-Rinchhin Zangpo, a famous lama of Kinnaur who came here 800 years ago. The monastery is situated on a hill at the confluence of Chandra and Bhaga rivers. It appears that this was a Hindu temple once, as there is still a statue in black stone of a goddess

** District Gazetteer of Lahul and Spiti, (1975), page 53.

identified as Kali. Rana of Triloknath, a Hindu who was also a follower of Buddhism, used to be its Kardar. He handed over this monastery to his Buddhist Guru Nawang Namgial of Bhutan who was also the king of that country, on the condition that a lama would be deputed by him for a period of every three years. The abbot of Bhutan monastery afterwards asked the lama of Tagna monastery in Ladakh which also was affiliated to the Bhutan monastery to send a lama to Guru Ghantal. The paintings are in stone colours. The main idols represent Lord Buddha, Nawang Namgial and Padmasambhava, the last is held in great esteem and his biggest statue is in Tayul monastery. The monastery owns land in several *kothis* of Lahul. The Kardar of the monastery is appointed by the Collector. All the land holders of Lahul used to pay a fee to this monastery but it is no longer being paid. With the decline of religious influence, the importance of this monastery has also gone down. The Pattanites who were the main visitors, now seldom go there and as for the people of Chandra and Bhaga valleys they have their own monasteries.”**

The monasteries at Shashur Gonpa above Keylong the district headquarters was founded in 17th century A.D. by Lama Deva Gyatshao of Ladakh whose idol is still kept there. A sort of miracle play is performed by the Lamas when a fair is held in the month of June. The acting consists of pantomime and dancing with occasional chorus. There is provision for a clown to regale the audience with jokes. This dance originated in the 10th century A.D. and has run since.

Kye monastery, another ancient one has also an annual mask dance and music. The masked lamas play the demons and show a display of weapons too.

“While on the subject of monasteries it may be worthwhile to write something on the institution of *buzhens*. Every son of a lama or monk becomes a *buzhen*, which is the name given to a low order of strolling monks or

** District Gazetteer of Lahul and Spiti, (1975) page 54-55.

friars. Sometimes the younger son of landholder becomes a *buzhen* in preference to going into the monastery. The *Pin buzhen*s are a curious set of people. They dress much like other monks, but instead of shaving their heads, wear their hair in long straight twists, which gives them a very wild appearance. According to a legend the *buzhen* order was founded by one Thang-teong Gyalpo (King of the desert) under the circumstances that a certain king of Lhasa the famous Langdrama, converted the people of Tibet from Buddhism to a new religion of his own. The Gyalpo succeeded so well that in the course of fifty years the old faith was quite forgotten, and the *Om Mane Padme Hum* or sacred ejaculation, quite disused. To win back the people Chan-rezin, the divinity worshipped at Triloknath caused an incarnation of himself to be born in the king's house in the person of Thang-teong Gyalpo. The child grew up a saint and reformer; he saw that it was impossible to reclaim the people by books, and he, therefore, adopted the dress since worn by the *buzhen*s, and spent his life in wandering from village to village, offering to amuse the people by acting miracle-plays on condition of their repeating after him the chorus *Om Mane Padme Hum* wherever it occurred in the recitation. In this way the people became again accustomed to repeat the sacred sentence, their mouths became purified, and the religion of Buddha revived. They have impressive ceremonies in which *Om Mane Padme Hum* is enchanted with great fervour and zeal. Frequently the *buzhen*s perform a conjuring trick in which a huge stone is split into two on the bare stomach of another *buzhen*.

Generally only the younger sons of the landowning class are admitted into a monastery; but of late this rule has been relaxed by the Kye monastery which admits younger sons of the landless sections also. When the boy is seven years old, his guardians take him to a monastery. A special ceremony presided over by the head lama and attended by at least four full-fledged priests is held. A three-fold change is supposed to take place in the initiate, the change of his name, the change of his garments and

the supposed change of his mental attitude. The initiate solemnly affirms to abide by thirty-six vows and directives, the more important ones being promises not to commit violence nor to keep company of woman nor to indulge in wine nor crime nor lying. After the ceremony the boy becomes a *Gayachhul* literally meaning 'who has religion'. Henceforth he spends the winter in the monastery and the summer at his home. Once in every three years, his lay guardian goes to the monastery to affirm solemnly that the *Gayachhul* did not, during his stay at his parent's place, infringe any of the sacred vows and directives. There have been some instances of *Gayachhul* being expelled from the monasteries on account of misbehaviour.

For thirteen years, the *Gayachhul* studies, generally under the tutelage of an elder inmate of the monastery, and when he attains the age of twenty he is considered fit to become a *Gaylong* i.e. a fullfledged lama or literally one who abides by religion. An auspicious day is chosen to mark this occasion of his graduation, and in the presence of the head lama and four other important lamas, he affirms to stand by 253 vows and directives, which are divided into the following six groups: (1) The Basic Four; (2) the Remaining Thirteen; (3) The Binding Thirty; (4) The Particular Ninety; (5) the Personally Forgivable four; and (6) the Peccadillo Prohibitive One Hundred and Twelve.

These 253 govern the principles of religion as also the personal conduct of a lama. Every *Gaylong* carries on his person an idol of the Lord Buddha at all times and prays to it for forgiveness whenever a minor deviation occurs from the chosen path.

Every monastery has a head lama *Khanpo*, a second lama *Uzat* and a third lama *Gaygo* who with the help of a committee of three *Chisova*, run the affairs of the institution. The second lama is a sort of a general assistant to the *Khanpo*; on the other hand the third lama's duties make him a sort of police chief of the monastery: he is

responsible for the safety of the property and for checking delinquent behaviour of the monks.”*

The hierarchy of Lamas from the Head Lama down below in every monastery and they are there, large and small, throughout encourages a spirit of religion which is the second nature in every person of Spiti particularly and in Lahul also. Small temples as *Iha-kang* or the devil's temple whets the appetite of religion all the more. They have set up small brass-images under the tree and on the tree, niches of the rocks, stone-dykes and practically at all conceivable places. Lamas come occasionally, burn the candle and utter some words.

At village Gemur about 18 km. from Keylong there is a *gompa* (monastery) where every year Devil-dance is done by the Lamas. Gondhla village has also a historic *gompa*. Gondhla has another importance which may be mentioned here :—

“The residence of the Thakur of Gondhla, probably the most frequently photographed building in the whole of Lahul, is eight storeys high. This striking, feudal edifice is built of stone and timber and is topped by an overlapping structure which protrudes several feet on all four sides. This unique building commands the passage of the valleys with a strong vantage point in the struggles that form part of the stormy history of this area while in the brief interludes of peace its loopholes must have been eyed with grave concern by all those who passed along the road, with the temptation of plundering this huge building. The tradition relates that the architect of the aforesaid castle was put to death to prevent him from building a similar construction for a rival baron. Mention may here be made of the incised huge boulders which are to be seen bearing human figures greater than life size. The painted crowns on the heads of some of these figures represent Buddhist deities.”**

This Gondhla building has quaint pictures; old weapons, idols, and collection of curios from Lhasa, Ladak and other places. Gondhla is by the side of a jeepable road.

* Mr. M. D. Mangain, *Lahul and Spiti*, (1975) page 56-58.

** *District Gazetteer of Lahul and Spiti*, (1975) page 273.

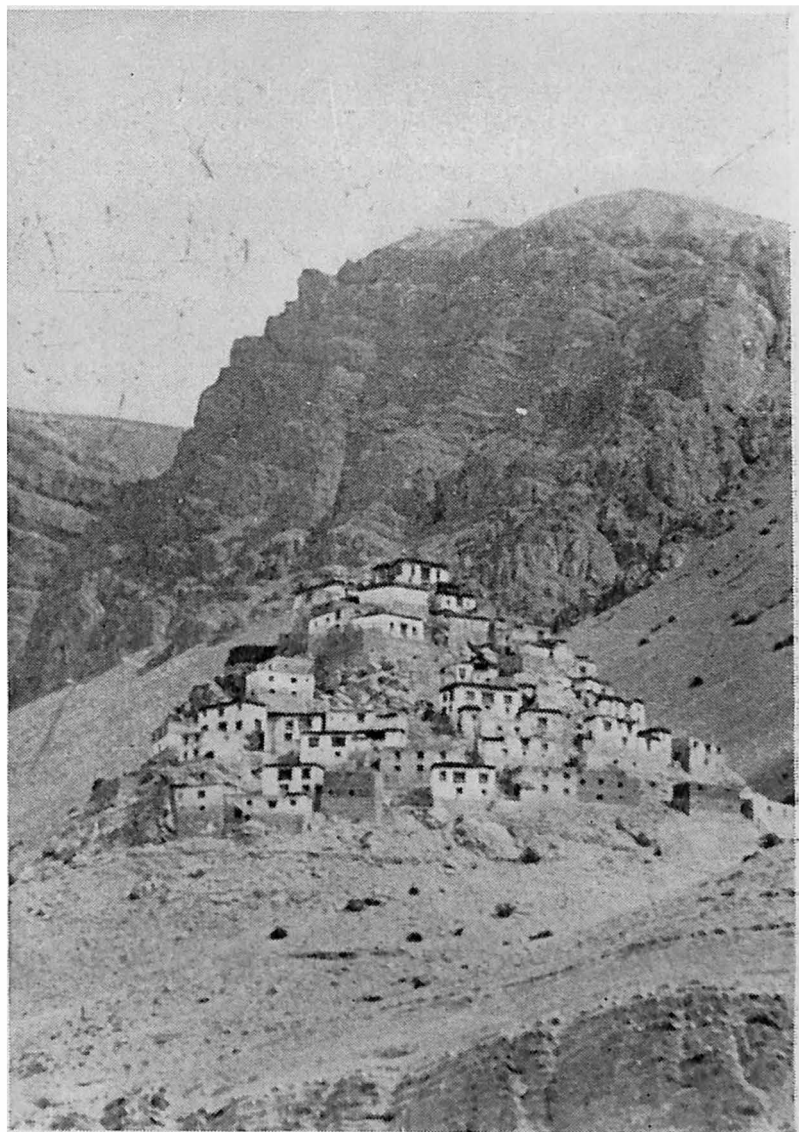
There is a fond belief that all the deities of Lahul and Kulu have their residence at village Jalma. Thus Jalma is important to the people of the area. Another village Khoksar is important to the Buddhists. Khoksar is supposed to be the coldest place in Lahul and the highest village in Chandra valley. There is a monastery here where the head lama is appointed for three years by rotation. The Presiding deity is taken to be the author of all the diseases prevalent from time to time. The lama has the unenviable job of keeping the deity well-satisfied so that the diseases do not break or if they break to get the fury abated.

The famed Rohtang Pass 'the main gateway between Lahul valley and the rest of the southern area of Kulu-Manali' is said to have been sanctified by the sojourn of Beas Rishi. Beas Rishi's hermitage was by the small stone enclosure and the water spring which flows into Beas river. The site of the spring was subsequently improved by Lehna Singh, a General under Maharaja Ranjit Singh, when Kulu was overwhelmed by the Sikh troops. To the left of the Pass is the little lake of Sarkund (also called Dashir). On the 20th *Bhadon* (early September) every year this small glacial lake is visited by a number of people from Kulu, Lahul and Spiti and even from other districts, the general belief being that a bath in it at the daybreak, on this particular occasion, cures all ailments. Almost directly opposite, and seemingly only a few kilometres away, is the well defined Sonapani glacier; slightly to the left are the twin peaks of Gye phang, the higher of the two being visible from as far as the Ridge in Simla. The Beas river rises near the crest of Rohtang. Some religious minded travellers make it a point to throw a coin into the springhead known as Beas Kund. But how different is the most dreaded Pass of the days of Moorcroft and Moravian Mission. Now amidst the wild and snowy scene there is constant rumbling of buses, cars and jeeps, P.W.D. trucks and other road building heavy machinery criss-crossing the Pass with thunder and confidence. Except in winter when there is heavy snow, the Pass is now crossed by the strongest mountaineers at every time of day and night. There are examples of the courageous few crossing over even in storm and snow.

The monastery at village Sissu at a height of 3,100 m. in Lahul Sub-division is perched on a steep rocky declivity is the only object which invariably attracts the tourists. This shrine reflects the strong influence of Buddhism in this area. It possesses a pleasant little rest-house surrounded by the willow trees, a primary school, and a maternity centre. The most awe-inspiring God is Geyphan at Sissu.

Tabo, an ancient village, more than 3,050 m. above sea level, has a small but beautiful hamlet on the left bank of the Spiti river. It is the second village in Spiti from the eastern approach. Flanked on either side by lofty hills, brown and sun-burnt, it is the seat of one of the most famous Buddhist *gompa* regarded by many as only next to the Tholing *gompa* in Tibet. The Tabo *gompa* is the seat of about 50 lamas and preserves a very big collection of scriptures and pieces of art, wall painting and stucco sculpture. The murals of this *gompa* have some similarity to Ajanta wall paintings. There was a severe earthquake on the 19th of January, 1975 and Tabo monastery was badly affected. Breaches had appeared on the fresco-paintings on the walls. These fresco paintings here do form a marvellous feature.

“Tandi village is situated at the confluence of Chandra and Bhaga rivers. There is an interesting legend on this confluence. It is said that Chandra and Bhaga were two lovers, Chandra being the daughter of the Moon and the Bhaga the son of the God Sun. To perform the eternal marriage they decided to climb the Baralacha Pass and from there run in opposite directions, encircling a vast tract of Lahul. Chandra was more active and smart and easily meandered her way down the Pass but when she reached Tandi, she felt concerned for her beloved and to find him, climbed up the valley towards the present village of Kaylong. Soon Bhaga was found coming with great struggle through the narrow rocks. Seeing him coming Chandra also came back to Tandi where consequently they both met and the celestial marriage was performed. From the starting points on the Baralacha Pass the water followed both of them which gradually took the form of two rivers that are known to-day after their names. From this point of



Kei Gumpha — Spiti Valley (Courtesy: H. P. Govt.).

confluence, i.e. Tandi, the joint name was given to the rivers, Chandrabhaga because Chandra and Bhaga had united into the eternal wedlock.”**

Tayul monastery about 6 kms. from Keylong is one of the oldest and has a very big statue of the great Buddhist scholar and preacher Padmasambhava referred to earlier.

So far the coverage is on the Buddhist monasteries and Buddhism at some length though as indicated before Hindus out-number the Buddhists. This is rightly so as there are hardly any Hindu temples in Lahul and Spiti. Almost every Hindu inhabitant here is imbued with Lamaism. This is not strange if we look into the background of the people.

“The people of Lahul are a mixed race; and linguistic research indicates that in remote times (c.B.C. 2,000), the country was inhabited by an aboriginal tribe, in language, and perhaps also in stock, analogous to the Munda-speaking tribes of Bengal and Central India.*** This tribe must have borrowed, in very early times, from the vocabulary of their Tibetan neighbours on the north-east and east, who must have constantly come in contact with them as nomad graziers, traders, or invaders. Survivors of the same ethnological stock are to be found in the Kanawar Kothi of Rupi Waziri in Kulu, in the isolated village of Malana and in the Bashahr tract on the Satluj. At a later period, Tibetan settlers came in from the north and east—from Rupshu and Ladakh into the head of the Bhaga Valley, and from Spiti and Tibet into the head of the Chandra Valley near Koksar, where the Tibetan spoken approximates rather to that of Spiti than to that of Ladakh. Aryans and semi-Aryans also came from the west and south, and the Lahulis at the present time are the ultimate product of the amalgamation of these different races. Their peculiar languages, three in number—Bunan, Tinan and Manchhat—are found to have strong affinities with the languages of the Munda-speaking tribes, but

** *District Gazetteer of Lahul and Spiti*, (1975) page 282.

*** Mundas are mostly concentrated in Chotanagpur area of the present State of Bihar.

are not related to the Aryan languages of India, and only in vocabulary related to the Tibetan, which is the vernacular of the Upper Chandra and Bhaga Valleys around Koksar and Kolong, and also the written language in most of the country. It seems probable, therefore, that at a distant time the whole hill tracts, from Kanawar in Bashahr to Lahul, including much of Kulu, were inhabited by tribes related to the Munda-speaking races of Central India.

During the Kulu supremacy a considerable influx of Kulu blood probably entered the veins of the Lahulis, especially in Pattan or Manchat and Chamba-Lahul.”**

Spiti has always been inhabited by the Tibetans, and the Western dialect of the Tibetan language is spoken. It was never a part of Kulu which formed a part of the original Kangra district under the British. Hindu rule over Spiti was very nominal and Hindu Rajas with the surname of ‘Sena’ ruled over Spiti before it went under Ladakh. Spiti was, as Hutchison and Vogel observe, more at the mercy of its neighbours, especially Ladakh, Bashahr and Kulu. When an invasion came the people ran to inaccessible mountain heights till the invaders retracted. The inhospitable area was not worth colonisation for the invaders. In 1841 the Sikhs annexed Kulu and sent a force to Spiti. Hutchison and Vogel write :

“After the annexation of Kulu by the Sikhs in 1841, a force was sent into Spiti. As usual the people fled to the uplands on its approach, leaving their houses and monasteries to be plundered. The burnt condition of the mural paintings in the temple of the Pin Monastery is said to have been due to the incendiarism of the Sikhs, but may have been the work of Ghulam Khan. No attempt, however, was made to annex the country which remained a province of Ladakh. In 1846, the whole Alpine Panjab from the Ravi to the Indus, including Ladakh and Spiti, was transferred in perpetual sovereignty to Raja Gulab-Singh of Jammu, but in the same year Spiti was exchanged for

** History of the Punjab Hill States—Hutchison and Vogel, Vol. II, —page 474-475.

other territory and added to Kulu, with the object of securing a road to the wool districts of Chang-Thing in Tibet proper. In the autumn of 1846, Sir (then Captain) A. Cunningham and Mr. Vans Agnew fixed the boundary between Spiti and Ladakh and Eastern Tibet, the mountainous and uninhabited territory to the east of the Baralacha and north of the Parang passes being attached to Spiti. The boundary run: from west of the Baralacha pass, crosses the Lingti plain, and passes eastward to the south of the Tsomoriri Lake, and thence south to the Satluj, touching Tibet proper on the way. This area is called Tsarab or Tsarab-Lingti.”**

Hinduism has always been there in this heterodox conglomeration of humanity. Siva as typified by the lofty snow mountain peaks as his divine abode has always excited the Paharis and at this end of India the people combined worship of Lord Siva with the worship of the many malevolent and benevolent spirits that could be conceived of. The inclemency of weather, the Nature's mighty forces as seen in the blizzards, snow-storms, cloud-bursts, torrential flow of the mighty rivers that shrink and freeze up in other seasons have had their toll on the human nature of the simple folks that live in very scattered hamlets in Lahul and Spiti. Hinduism was also not propped up by temples or the Brahmin Priests. The latter class is almost absent. The economic exigencies stood on the way of elaborate rituals. So when Buddhism came followed by Lamaism and a number of later Buddhist deities like Avolokiteswar, Hariti, Trilochon etc., were brought from Tibet side and installed, the *Paharis* found a bigger source to appease their sense of religion. Fear and mystique—the two forces that had given them the eternal Siva in the mountain peaks with the interplay of thick, dark clouds often hanging on to the mountains and taking different shapes and hues gave way and they found Avolokiteswar, Trilochon etc., as different manifestations of Lord Siva. The isolation of the *Paharis* here from the Northern plains made them turn more and more to the Buddhist

** *History of the Punjab Hill States*, Hitchison and Vogel, Vol. II, page 487-88.

Lamas who were from Tibet side. As a result we find a wonderful and peaceful intermingling and co-existence of the two faiths Hinduism and Buddhism. In this part of the country it was usual for the people to become Buddhist Lamas, take the Yellow robes and resort to the Buddhist monasteries but after sometime they may come away and take to their civil life and start worshipping Siva and Avolokiteswar as Hindu Gods. To the average man there is little distinction between the two faiths. The same man worships the Buddha images and the other lesser Buddhist deities and pay homage to the Buddhist Lamas with as much respect as they cherish for the Hindu deities. The Lamas also have allowed, a large elbow-room. They allow some form of Hindu worship in the Buddhist monasteries. They allow animal sacrifice to appease the Gods. Verily the two faiths have coalesced and almost-conglomerated but jointly they have not been able to stamp out Animism and Superstitious beliefs. The Buddhists and the Hindus in this area still believe in witches, witchcraft and exorcising the witches that take possession of the humans.

The peaceful co-existence of Hinduism and Buddhism has hardly any parallel in the main-land of India. Hinduism became militant and almost drove out Buddhism which carved a place for itself in the fringe areas like Chittagong Hills (now in Bangladesh), and in Nepal beyond India. In Thailand, however, we find a parallel. The Thais, more than ninety per cent of whom are Buddhists followed the Khmers in Siam (now Thailand) and have retained Brahmanism to a great extent. Brahma, Siva and Vishnu are recognised and Hindu deities are venerated. Rama and Ramayan have become a sheetanchor of their culture.*

The festivals and the amusements of the Lahulis and the Spitians are all, more or less, associated with religion.

In Lahul, the principal festivals are *Halda*, *Phagli* and *Gotsi*.

Halda is the new year day of Chandra and Bhaga valleys and Phagli of Pattan. *Halda* is also known as *Losar*. The

* Preface to *Folk Tales of Thailand* by P. C. Roy Choudhury.

date is fixed by the Lamas and it is generally in January. Sticks of Pencil Cedar are burnt and piled up. *Shiskar-apa* (the goddess of wealth) is worshipped and *Chhang* (home-brewn liquor) is a necessary part of the festivities. The festival is celebrated for two or three days but strictly at home. No visits are made, rather a visit by a friend is taken to be a bad omen. Within a fortnight of *Halda* the festival *Phagli* essentially an offering of flowers is held.

Gotsi festival is held where a son has been born during the preceding year. *Chhang* is liberally consumed by people visiting the houses where sons have been born. The village god is worshipped by the *Lahdaopa* (the village priest) with a bow and arrow. Probably the original idea was to ask the God to make the child a warrior. Communal dance in the night closes the festivity.

In Spiti no festival could take place without a liberal consumption of *Chhang*. *Losar* lasting for three days is the new year celebration sometime in November or December. The birth-day of Lama Chan Ri Zi is celebrated on the 15th of the first *Bhoti* month. The Lama has been deified although the average Spitian knows him by name only. *Da Chang* festival is for youngmen particularly and an arrow is released from the bow to mark the victory over the evil. At *Yaul* festival Lord Triloki Nath equally important to the Hindus and Buddhists is worshipped. This is held in the second week of June, *Namgam* festival marks the ripening of the crops in September and horse races are a particular feature. The home-coming of the crops is celebrated with offerings to the deities and merry-making by dances kept up with *Chhang*. *Chho Thang* is an exclusively religious festival when a Lama reads out portions of the holy scriptures. The sowing of the field is followed by *Lapsol* when the deities are worshipped and their blessings are invoked for good crops.

Gutor and *Chakhar* festivities are held in the monasteries. Prayers are offered for three days continuously and on the fourth day the famous Devil dance is performed by the Lamas. The idea is that when devils predominate the gods descend from the heavens and over-run them. The abbot and the

superior monks dressed in their religious regalia sit in a circle chanting hymns. Lesser monks dressed as demons with horrible masks, strange weapons and other instruments hold the devil's dance, retreating, advancing, dancing and yelling. This festival of *Chakhar* at Tabo monastery held every fourth year is attended very widely and people from Tibet side also join.

The villagers also organise devil's dance known as *Chham*.

It may be mentioned that in Spiti, men and women would have dance together for every occasion of festival or marriages. The Lamas, however, do not participate in these dances.

There is a community of professional dancers called *Betas* who go round and hold various types of dances. They are poor economically and low in caste-hierarchy. Some of their dances are for social reasons while a few others are religious.

Folk and Ritual Dances in Tribal Area

One of the conspicuous features of the tribal life in Trans-Himalayan region with unflinching Buddhist faith, is its colourful dances which may conveniently be seen divided into two groups. One is a folk dance with many types varying according to the types of assemblage, steps, rhythm and beat. The second is a ritual masked dance in monasteries called *chham* dance.

Folk dance is as natural to the tribals of this borderland as speech to human beings. As generally goes with the tribals their melodies are marked by limited range of tunes in simple keys. Singing, dancing and drinking all go together. The incessant repetition, rather than variety, is what is favoured by all the singers and dancers. The audience is seldom apart from what forms a group of singers and dancers. However, the musicians constitute a different class who take their seat distinctly to give accompaniment to the singing and dancing crowd. The myths, legends, folktales, ballads and riddles which mirror musings, beliefs and traditions of the tribal people come to light. It is either a harvest time or any other

festive occasion that the myths and legends are recited. In the winter season when they sit around a warming fire, the old men and women tell folktales and riddles. In Lahaul the people used to burn with great economy and care wood of willow, poplar, birch and juniper, the only few species that are scantily seen growing there. The Spiti Valley is more or less devoid of this gift of the nature too. The Spitians have some bushes stacked on the roof-tops of their houses. Of late, the Lahaulas have taken to stoves fitted with pipes which serve as outlet for smoke. Some Spitians have also now taken to this technique of cooking and warming.

The tribals in Lahul and Spiti have a variety of musical instruments to play upon. Every monastery has a set of musical instruments which is used in temple services and also occasionally on private ceremonies. These instruments include different kinds of gongs and bells, trumpets and horns, flutes, oboes, flageolets, conch shells, cymbals, beating drums and a few others. Many of these are made of silver and copper or both combined with engravings or repouse work carrying symbolic and stylised designs. Of these designs lotus and *vajra* (sceptre) are the two very common.

A musical instrument used invariably in liturgical ceremonies and deserving special notice is *kangdum*, also known as *kangling*. It is made of thigh bone of human being extracted of the corpse. Thigh bone is embellished with silver and bronze work before it is finally consecrated as a sacred object. Thigh bone of a woman, who dies in pregnancy, is more valued as the instrument made of it is believed to produce a sound that is peculiarly efficacious for conjuring the benevolent spirits. Thigh bone of *khanduma*, a woman of good and auspicious omens, is seldom missed and it is some learned lama who decides upon the issue on the basis of his astrological calculations.

Gonkhan is a room in a monastery which is generally dark and has mysterious fittings providing an atmosphere for the lamas to evoke or propitiate the terrifying gods resting on a pedestal just opposite the entrance. All sorts of

masks, weapons, dresses and ritual objects are generally stored in the *gonkhan* and as the atmosphere is charged with an air of fear, women are not allowed here. A big drum with one leg is seen hanging with the help of two ropes in between the two pillars and the lama beats it rhythmically with a curved stick while murmuring his recitations in a deep guttural voice. Daily worship invoking fierce deities is done by the resident lamas. Besides the grotesquely appearing masks, one among various equipment that create a sense of terror, is the bowl, made of human skull used for offering blood, wine or water to the deities and also for their drinking by the lamas.

A sacred masked dance locally known as *chham* is done only by the lamas in the monasteries before a large concourse of spectators on some festive occasion. Since masks are more or less akin to those of the devils, it is also called devil dance.

The lamas put on embroidered and brocaded robes of gorgeous colours and the heads are covered with masks made of wood or papier-mache with a thin coat of plaster. These masks are prepared by the lamas themselves and like the Tibetan paintings and sculptures know no deviation from what the rules and norms precisely lay down. These precious robes and masks are the property of the monastery and these are kept carefully stored in a room under the charge of a *kardar* (keeper).

According to one belief the object of putting on masks of grotesque appearance is to give an idea to the spectators of the types of dread monsters who are met by the soul after it quits the earthly plane. These masks are made after many imaginative figures of monsters, dragons, beasts, devils, imps, spirits and skeletons. The departed soul is frightened and perplexed by these terrifying figures and then the lama or some saint appears to protect it and guide it to a safe end. The theory obviously is an attempt to establish the supremacy of priesthood over temporal power and command allegiance from simple god-fearing common folk.

Another belief is that the lamas put on these masks to combat malignant spirits. The figures with demoniac appearances are the terrifying defenders of religion or righteousness and also stand for the horrifying aspects of the Bodhisattvas.

Apart from what the popular belief goes, there is some meaning in these plays which the initiates well understand. Killing the evil king is only an allegory, the real meaning is "Killing of one's own self." The dancers appear in eight different masks or there may be more but then they will be grouped in eights. These *krodha* or horrifying manifestations of the eight great Bodhisattvas help the monks to acquire the highest insight.

A clover leaf blade often topped by the head of a *khyung* (garuda) bird is a very typical ritual attribute called *phurbu*. It is one of the most important weapons of tantric deities used by the lamas for exorcising evil spirits or pinning down evil demons. This magic dagger is either made of wood, preferably *khadira*, or steel or even cast in bronze. *Phurbus* come invariably in use during ritual masked dance. During the tantric ceremonial the devil is summoned up and a spell is cast on him. It is with the *phurbu* that he is held fast.

A well known masked dance lasting several hours features the murder of the evil king Lang-dar-mar. The history of Tibet records that Ral-pa-cen, who ruled from 815 to 835 A.D., was a great religious king to uphold the Buddhist faith. He founded many monasteries and looked to the Indian Buddhism as the only faith of the right type and propagated it through the media of art and literature. In 817 A.D. Buddhism was severely attacked by the evil king Lang-dar-mar who was Ral-pa-cen's elder brother. The Buddhist followers were persecuted. Later the king Ral-pa-cen was murdered by his opponents and the power was seized by the 'evil king'. The process of persecution continued until 836 A.D. when one of the Buddhist followers murdered Lang-dar-mar.

The mystery play is also staged by the Red Hats to mark the birthday of Padmasambhava, the apostle of Tantric

Buddhism, on the tenth day of the fifth month of Tibetan calendar. The lamas who dance in this mystery play make some recitation inside the temple in a strictly ritual manner before they actually come on the inner courtyard of the monastery for the performance.

Sissu and other fairs: Sissu is a common fair celebrated all over the Buddhist Himalayas. Its main attraction is always a masked dance but because it is a part of monastic rituals, it is always staged inside the monastery on the attached courtyard. The fair is celebrated on different dates at different places. At Sussur Gompa (monastery) it is held in June, at Gemur Gompa in July and at Mani Gompa of Gondhla in August. Apart from the Sissu fair there are also a number of other fairs in Lahaul featuring masked dance. Phagli, also called Kunh, is a fair of Pattan Valley which is held on *amavasa*, the first day of the dark half of the month of February (Magh-Phalgun).

It is interesting to note that the Lahaulas of Pattan Valley celebrate Diwali not on the day when it is celebrated elsewhere in India. As against *amavasa*, the all dark night, it takes place on full moon night and the main feature of the celebrations is illuminations by lighting small sticks of firewood. A similar festival of illuminations is Halda which is celebrated in Gondhla and Gahar Valleys in Lahaul but unlike the fixed dates for Diwali and Phagli it is held on different days in the month of February.

A festival organised on a grand scale in Gumrang Kothi *i.e.* in Keylong and round about is Gochi falling some time in January or February as is decided by the lamas on the basis of their astrological calculations. The main object of the festival is to celebrate jointly the births of all the male children born during the preceding year.

At Thang-gyud monastery a religious festival called *idjed* takes place in the month of October and a month later a similar festival called *guitor* is held in the monasteries at Kee, Tabo, Dankhar and Pin, all in Spiti Sub-division. The masked dance is invariably arranged on these occasions

and the purpose is to protect people from diseases and epidemics and ensure health, happiness and all-round prosperity.

On the eve of New Year a dance is acted by the lamas in courtyard of a monastery belonging to the sect of Yellow Hats. The villagers are allowed to witness the show and they take it not as an entertainment but with all religious fervour. This sect was founded by Tsong-Kha-pa (1357-1419 A.D.) who is held by the Gelugpas (Yellow Hats) as an emanation of Manjushri; and Vajra Bhairava, called Dorje Jik-che in Tibetan, is its chief protector.

There is a mystery play called Black Hat Dance. Here the lama does not wear mask, instead he puts on a highly ornate head-dress. This dance is of pre-Buddhist origin. It is some sort of a pantomime accompanied some time by outcries and interjections.

Another dance of pre-Buddhist origin, *i.e.*, of the times of Bompas, which has continued to this day, is Red Tiger Dance. It is ceremonised at the end of Old Year. The Bon religious practices included cannibalism and human sacrifice which were carried on with a view to propitiating the deities and exorcising the evil spirits. In his attempt to replace Bon cult by Buddhism the great lama Padmasambhava cleverly adopted some of Bon rituals but only on their face. These devil dances were allowed to continue but the ghastly practices of human sacrifice and cannibalism were virtually put to an end.

These dances are not simple gay and abandon on some lilting tunes but every step and movement of the lamas are carried out strictly according to the rules. The older lamas are the masters to watch if anything wrong goes with the dancers and the musicians. The itinerant monks play religious music on a large drum and cymbals and others with long trumpets and small horns. The music that accompanies the dance is evocative of a particular mood which is detected by the object of the dance. Whether it is a New Year Dance of the Gelugpas (Yellow Hats) or a dance ceremonising the

murder of evil king Lang-dar-mar, the object is sacredly upheld.”**

This sort of faith has wonderfully suited the Lahulis and the Spitians in the twilight of modernisation in which they live. It is this coalition of religious faiths and superstitions that have moulded their society. They have got a very pragmatic approach to life. They have polyandry, and, if not, the younger brothers occasionally share the elder sister-in-law if she and her husband do not object. They are not rigid about pre-marital sex. The surplus women due to polyandry go to the nunnery where they are respected. They may leave the nunneries and take to civil life just as the male counterparts do. Their problem to life is a calculation of making merits and committing sins. The observations of Gerald D. Berreman though about Garhwal area apply more or less to the people of this area :

“Hindu unorthodoxy in the area is due in part to the cultural heritage of the *Paharis* and in part to their isolation from areas where modern Hinduism developed. It is ascribed by *Paharis* to poverty and their difficult environment. They have little time or money for the luxury of the elaborate rituals of the plains. They claim to lack of water for the frequent purificatory baths of plainsmen, the leisure to endure fasts and food taboos, the money to hire learned Brahmins, and the education to appreciate these things. In this, as in the freedom of women, they are like low-caste people of the plains. Their increasing awareness of this similarity, resulting from increasing contacts with plains people, leads high-caste *Paharis* to aspire to emulate plains behaviour in order to improve their relative status.

In discussing *Pahari* culture, the plains have been chosen for comparison because the culture of that area is closely associated with that of the Himalayan hills. The two areas have a common cultural base upon which differences stand out in high relief. Also, it is among people of the plains that the most comparable work has been done upon which

** *The Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas* by K. L. Vaidya, (National, 1977, page 62-67).

comparisons can be based. However, one familiar with the plains must guard against plains-oriented ethnocentrism, in which the plains become the yardstick by which Pahari culture is measured. It is important to bear in mind that Pahari culture is viable in its own right. The fact that it is marginal to the Indian and North Indian culture areas and that it has also apparently been influenced from Tibet does not mean that it is a hodgepodge of borrowings or a distorted reflection of other cultures. The borrowed traits have been integrated into the matrix that is Pahari culture.

The observer of Pahari culture is struck not only by the traits which bear similarities to those found in other culture areas and that have been either borrowed from them or derived from a common origin, but also by the unique traits that, so far as can be determined, were developed by the residents of this region. These range from agricultural techniques such as complex seats of terracing and irrigation, and uniquely constructed and styled houses, to the songs, dances, folklore, and religion of the area.

Moreover, the Pahari area has made important contributions to the cultures of adjacent areas. The Hindu god Shiva, for example, may have originated in Pahari culture, and it is not improbable that some cultural characteristics commonly attributed to the plains have emanated from the hills.

Perhaps more significant than particular traits and their affinities is the distinctive over-all configuration of Pahari culture. To those who live it, Pahari culture is as distinct and as internally consistent as is the culture of any other group, whether it be in an area of "culture climax" or in a "marginal" area. Marginality is relative. From the Pahari's point of view the plains of North India constitute an area as marginal to his own as do the high Himalayas to the north."**

** *Hindus of the Himalayas* by Gerald D. Berreman, University of California Press, 1972 (page 355-356).

WALL PAINTINGS ON THE TEMPLES OF HIMACHAL

One distinct feature in some of the temples of Himachal Pradesh that has to be noticed is the wall paintings which have been decaying through neglect. In the recent decades there has been some study into the wall paintings by a number of scholars although they were noticed earlier by archaeologists and historians.** Dr. Miss Mira Seth's laborious research in "Wall Paintings of the Western Himalayas" is an excellent study on the subject. The wall paintings though not very old (17th to 19th Century) give us a good idea of the religious sense which found an expression in them.

Wall paintings are to be seen in the temples of the districts of Kangra, particularly, and in Kulu, Chamba, Mandi, Mahasu, and Simla.

In Kangra district the *Thakurdvara*, known as Lord Krishna's shrine in Nurpur fort has a number of such paintings mostly on the themes of Lord Krishna's love dalliances and other legends. The temple is a double storey structure and the verandah in the ground floor was once apparently covered with paintings, many of which have been rubbed out or repeatedly white washed.

** Coomaraswamy, A. K., *Mughal Painting* (Catalogue of the Indian Collections in the Museum of Fine Art, Boston).

Anand, Mulk Raj, *Persian Paintings*.

Archer, W. G., *Indian Painting in the Punjab Hills, Indian Miniatures, Kangra Paintings*.

Brown, Percy, *Indian Painting*, Oxford University, Paris.

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Several District Gazetteers of Himachal Pradesh.

Randhawa, M. S.—*Kangra Valley Paintings, Krishna Legends in Pahadi Painting, Kangra painting of Geeta Gobinda, some Nurpur Paintings, Articles in several Art Magazines*.

(See *Bibliography in Wall Paintings of the Western Himalayas* by Dr. Mira Seth (Publications Division, India, 1976).

At Nadaun the temple Shivalaya built by Raja Sansar Chand of Kangra (A.D. 1776-1823) has a number of paintings on the scene of two Rajas playing *Chaupar* (drafts), Shiva and Parvati, Krishna and Radha, etc. As mentioned elsewhere Raja Sansar Chand was a great patron of temples and temple paintings. His capital Sujampur Tira has the temples of the Gaurishankar, Murali Manohar and Narmadesvara. The first two temples are full of paintings. The themes are Shiva and Parvati and the Devi's confrontation with the Mahisasur and scenes of the Ramayana. There are several panels regarding the marriage of Rama and his brothers, Rama's happy life in Panchavati etc. Narmadesvara temple's paintings are mainly about the legends of Lord Krishna and Radha. Here there are two panels depicting the famous legend of *Govardhanadharana*. There is a remarkable painting showing Krishna as a King and seated on a throne listening to music. One of the paintings depicts Guru Nanak talking to Mardana.

Dr. Mira Seth remarks :—"In the earliest wall paintings in the Himalayas, secular scenes are rarely found. Narmadesvara is an exception of this. In one panel is depicted Raja Sansar Chand standing in a forest. In another, he is shown standing with his courtiers in front of a *Guru* behind whom is illustrated a small temple. There is an illustration of the town of Vrindavana and finally, a beautiful hunting scene showing *rajas* and nobles out-hunting on horse back painted in very vivid red, maroon, orange, green, blue and brown colours."**

Gaurishankara temple on a hill top above Narmadesvara temple stated to be built by Raja Sansar Chand in A.D. 1804 has also a number of remarkable paintings." "Architecturally, the Gaurishankara temple is somewhat unconventional as it does not follow the norms laid down in the ancient treatises on temple architecture. The images of Siva and Parvati also do not conform to the conventional iconographic types. Siva here looks like a pahadi young man and Parvati has the features of a Rajput woman of the hills. Its non-conformity

** *Wall Paintings of Western Himalayas* by Dr. M. Seth (page 51).

may be partly explained by the fact that it was not meant to be a temple for the public but only a private chapel.

Sansar Chand lived in this fort after his political ambition of dominance over the entire hill region had ended due to the Gorkha invasion and subsequent Sikh domination. It seems that Sansar Chand then devoted his entire time and declining energies to his favourite pastime—the pursuit of pleasure. According to the legend he shut himself up in this fort with his favourite dancing girl Jamalo and refused to see his courtiers. The courtiers would come up to the fort, salute a tree standing in front of the royal apartments and depart, having paid their homage through the tree to their prince.

These paintings are locally believed to have been executed by artists from Delhi or by the Bujheru family of Brahmin artists who are supposed to have painted the walls of the Narmadesvara. The paintings in the Gaurishankara temple represent Raja Sansar Chand's tastes in a very direct and uninhibited manner. Like his way of life at this time, the paintings are dedicated to the pursuit of love in a frank and open manner without any sheltering behind the curtain of any religious symbols. Here lovers are shown seated on balconies admiring the beautiful scenery or taking a stroll through the gardens where entwined creepers and pairs of birds seem to echo their love. Like all conventional Indian lovers they are rapturously happy in listening to music which is shown in one of the panels. It is perhaps as an apology or an afterthought of their sheer abandon to passion that a few other themes were introduced. Near the ceiling are floral designs, interspersed among them are very small panels showing Siva and Parvati in the forest with Ganesa, a lady playing or her *vina* the Devi and a few beautiful *ranis*.

The drawing of the Gaurishankara paintings is very similar to that of the Narmadesvara; the style is typical of the Kangra School patronised by Sansar Chand. Most of the colours of these paintings have faded perhaps due to the use of strong incense in the temple. Whatever remains is proof of excellent quality. The artists not only broke convention

by painting secular themes here but also in drawing and painting them in a very naturalistic fashion. For the first time, in pahadi wall paintings are found mountains and hills painted as they are observed in nature. The foot-hills are painted in rich green shades; little higher up the mountains become brown tinged with the orange of the sun's rays, and finally are shown the snow covered peaks. The paintings of these mountains are so realistic that when one visits this temple, one finds almost similar mountainscape outside the temple as was painted by artists nearly a hundred and seventy years ago inside its precincts. The use of light yellow, orange, green, red and blue gives the effect of spring, the season of love which the patrons and artists wanted to portray."**

The *Matha* (monastery) at Damtal in the Nurpur tahsil of Kangra district contains some beautiful paintings more in the Mughal fashion. There are illustrations from the legends of Siva, Krishna and Rama along with other lesser deities. Krishna's dalliances as a young boy are depicted including one of Krishna holding aloft the Goverdhana hill. There is a remarkable painting of Krishna touching the feet of Radha seated on her bed as a *Manini Nayika* (a lover in temper). There are also some paintings of the Rama legend in which Sita figures.

"Scenes of Rama and Lakshmana looking sadly across an expanse of water perhaps refer to Sita's abduction. There are a few panels exhibiting Rama and Lakshmana making preparations for war and actually encouraging their armies in the fight with Ravana. Ravana is also depicted in one of his palaces in the company of his queen and princesses. Rama, Sita and Lakshmana, returning with their armies to Ayodhya after the period of exile, are also painted. The most significant painting of the Rama legend which is preserved in a very good state is an illustration of Rama and Sita sitting on a throne under a canopy inside a *shamiana* surrounded by the ladies of the palace, while Hanumana and Sugriva are paying homage to them. A very effective use has been made of space

** *Wall Paintings of the Western Himalayas* by Dr. Mira Seth (1976), (page 51-52.)

in illustrating this small panel. Rama and Sita are in the main *shamiana* and the courtiers are shown seated in a separate *shamiana* in the compound. In another corner of the compound, female musicians and dancers are performing. On both sides of the composition are palace balconies from which royal ladies are shown observing the festivities in the compound.

A beautiful illustration of the *samudramanthana* or churning of the sea for nectar by the *devatas* and *rakshasas* is also found here. Two panels depict Vishnu reclining on the *Sesanaga* while Lakshmi is pressing his feet.

There are only two panels illustrating secular scenes. One illustrates Bhagwan Narayana Das (to whom the execution of the paintings is attributed by the *matha* authorities) conversing with Jahangir. In the other panel is painted a marriage *pandal* decorated with leaves and parrots, which is very similar to a scene illustrated in the Pindori paintings.”**

There are also a number of paintings in several rooms of a *matha* (monastery) at Dharmasala and many of these are secular. They are much more recent and some of the legendary characters have been shown with turban and beard borne in the Sikh fashion.

In Simla district the Gopal Mandir at village Shogi about 10 km before Simla has also a number of paintings and the style of drawing is very refined. The themes are Radha and Krishna, Siva and Parvati, Vishnu reclining on the *Sesanaga* and killing Hiranyakasipu. A panel from the Ramayana depicts Rama on horse back, followed by his three brothers and the faithful Hanumana and Sugriva. Secularism had penetrated in the paintings of the 19th century and we find in one painting Laila offering a cup of drink to Majnu. There is a tender illustration of the *Todi Ragini* painted delicately. The forlorn love-tossed girl is playing on her string instrument while a slick dear is looking at her with sympathy.

** *Wall Paintings of the Western Himalayas* by Dr. Mira Seth (1976), (page 54.)



Wall Painting: Dharamtal Mahantan — Ram, Sita and Lakshmana.

The paintings of Kulu temples have to be seen to be admired. One excellent Devi mural of Kulu representing the goddess Tripura-Sundri had been shifted to the National Museum, New Delhi." It is a big panel and covers the entire wall from the ground to the ceiling and represents the goddess Tripurasundri, an aspect of Durga or the Devi. The theme relates itself to the three worlds—*svarga*, *martya* and *patala*—paying homage to the goddess who was the most beautiful in all the three worlds. In order to illustrate this the artist tried to create a universe in motion with entire humanity coming to the palace of the Devi or getting ready to do so, or just meditating on her or singing her praise. In this painting are found the common people on foot, princes and princesses in their chariots, female and male soldiers, other gods and goddesses in their chariots along with their devotees, all proceeding in crowds to the palace of Tripurasundri. Elephants, horses, deer etc. are also seen in this crowd. The primacy of the Devi in this temple is sought to be shown in other ways as well. In one of the panels her consort, Siva, is represented as performing the *Tandava* dance while she sits at the top of the panel on a lotus pedestal. In another panel Brahma, the creator of the three worlds, is shown in attendance with a book in his hands. The central panel of this enormous mural is occupied by the Devi presented in a well-knit and effective composition. At the four corners of the panel are presented four palaces painted in white and sheltering in each of them a seated figure of the Devi who is being attended upon by female *chauri* bearers or surrounded by female devotees. There is also a palace in the centre in which a five-headed Devi is seated on the body of a prostrate Siva. In front of her the heavy, rounded and obese form of a *raja* stands with folded hands wearing a turban and an *achkan* (long coat) very similar to the *achkans* in contemporary use. This figure evidently represents the donor or patron of the painting or the temple or of both. Behind the Devi stands an old grey-haired queen with a crown on her head in front of whom stand two young princesses, again with crowns on their heads. Below the Devi's throne or *chauki*, the ground is painted in maroon colour and *devis* and *devatas* are sitting

in worshipful positions. On the left hand side are seen many princesses and their retinue of women, all decked in attractive clothes. All around the central panel are seen the devotees of the Devi.”**

Dr. Mira Seth continues :

“What is interesting to note is that even in this crowded world of the nobility and the aristocracy, the artist made use in his composition of the common people and their daily round of life. They are presented in the context of their lowly environs, sometime talking to *sadhus* and taking their advice, at others going about their other normal day-to-day pursuits like tending cows. There is a remarkable painting of a lady just sitting in her house and evidently gossiping with her friends. Scholars both male and female are shown reading from manuscripts and reciting *mantras* from them. The *sadhus* were accepted as normal human beings forming a segment of society, and were not considered as any special group or class that demanded any special attention; in the paintings they are not extended any unusual veneration. The artists have shown them on river banks or in huts or under trees seated in meditation. They are also depicted in ordinary human pursuits like washing their clothes after a bath or warming themselves in front of a fire. *Yoginis* or women *yogis* have also been painted. The artists of the Devi mural have taken a great deal of interest in presenting their thematic content in the context of nature. But while they presented vegetal nature and the world of animals in a somewhat naturalistic manner, flowing water like streams and rivers and hills were shown very conventionally.

Considerable attention has been given to the drawing of architectural details. The huts of the common people, the houses of the relatively rich and the palaces of the Devi have all been painted with attention to detail. The huts of the poor, for instance, are painted in mustard and brown to give the effect of straw, the larger houses in red and white to produce the effect of standstone and marble. The palaces

** *Wall Paintings of the Western Himalayas* by Dr. Mira Seth (1976), (page, 75-77.)

of the Devi are provided with columns, turrets and towers which were so common in Rajasthani palaces. There is one interesting technical point to note in this painting, namely, the use of the design of cubes within cubes, evidently to create the illusion of depth.

Compositionally speaking, the mural has been divided into horizontal and vertical sub-divisions, their backgrounds being painted in a variety of colours, namely, dark grey, slate grey, royal blue, navy blue, almond colour, pale green, bottle green, maroon, orange and red. The coloured backgrounds also act as smooth bases for the compositions painted on them. For example, when the background is green, the dress of the Devi in the foreground is in red; when the background is in blue, yellow and orange predominate in the foreground. When small self-contained cameos are painted on the background, the effect is one of total harmony as seen in a painting of a woman sitting in her house. The strips of different backgrounds blend harmoniously with each other. The colours used in the Devi mural do not, however, have the translucent finish of the Shogi or the Narmadesvara temple murals at Sujampur Tira; nevertheless the colours used have been given in their rendering a quality of vigour and vitality.”**

In Chamba the temple of Devi-ri-Kothi appears to have been built in 1754 but the paintings are of later origin, possibly, in the first quarter of the 19th century. The temple is dedicated to Devi and has the themes of legends of the Devi or Durga painted. But there are also some paintings about Lord Krishna and the *Gopis*. Incidentally the Rangmahal palace of the Raja has the largest number of paintings in the hills some of which are about the legends of Krishna, Rama and Siva. There is distinct Rajasthani influence in the paintings.

We are not much concerned here regarding the technique, form and style of the wall-paintings and would not discuss “if the paintings were part of a harmonious creation of art or were primarily intended to be decorative” which has been

** *Wall Paintings of the Western Himalayas* by Dr. Mira Seth, (1976), (Page, 77-78.)

dealt with by the critics including Dr. Mira Seth. We have to remember the later times and the social norms when the wall-paintings were done. But we like to quote the following from Dr. Seth's book, with which we fully agree :—

“The ritualistic religious beliefs of the royal patrons and the artists also tended to reduce wall paintings to the level of mere decorative works. As a result of such beliefs and due to an urge to reform and propagate them, they tended to choose the most popular legends from the Ramayana, the Mahabharata and the *Bhagavata Purana* which were evocative of immediate response from the common people. The celebrated legends like the love of Radha and Krishna, Rama and Sita and Siva and Parvati naturally lent themselves to very decorative presentation. In the actual technique of painting also, the patrons and the artists chose to depict the popular themes in small panels so that an ordinary visitor could appreciate them without taxing his imagination too much. As a further concession to plebeian taste, they embellished the panels with a variety of floral designs. These floral designs helped, more than anything else, to give a decorative character to these paintings. In the choice of floral motifs, the Pahadi paintings were not alone as a similar tradition prevailed in Rajasthani wall paintings. There is great similarity in design also. The paintings in the Divanji-ki-Haveli in Alwar have floral designs very similar to those found in the Narmadesvara temple at Sujanpur Tira.”**

In conclusion we have to mention that though the Mughal Courts had inspired the wall-paintings in Himachal temples and there was distinct impact of the style and techniques of Rajput paintings the Himachali paintings did carve out a distinctiveness of its own and the Rajas of the Hill States were the greatest patrons. The Hill Rajas believed they were holding the States as trustees of God and, however, secular and earthy, they wanted the painters to bring out God's excellence in their art. The work that the Rajas could produce with their limited resources (quite insignificant in comparison with the wealth of the Mughal Court) through the dedicated

** *Wall Paintings of the Western Himalayas* by Dr. Mira Seth, (1976), (Page 100).

artists were of high order though not of the level of Ajanta. The temple paintings give us a good idea of the social and economic conditions besides the religious beliefs of the times. The paintings confirm that faith in Siva, Devi or Durga, Rama and Sita, Lord Krishna and Radhika continued in the area unabated.

The Krishna cult predominates as the theme in Pahari painting and the paintings of the women-folk are superb. Krishna has been depicted both as human and as divine. After Krishna cult comes Siva-Parvati there. Different aspects of Siva and Parvati have been painted including the five-faced Siva. Then come the stories of Ramayana and Mahabharat and Bhagawat Purana. *Ragamala* is another difficult theme where a *Raga* is humanised and expressed delicately. The particular atmosphere of a *Raga* is difficult to express and this has been delicately and effectively in the Pahari painting. The *Ragini todi* is expressed by a love-lorn woman playing on a *Vina* and a wild deer listening to the tilt enraptured.

K. L. Vaidya could be quoted :

"In National Gallery of Art, New Delhi, there are several Pahari paintings which are illustrative of the Ragas and Raginis, such as Raga Kanhra, Raga Malava (sons of Sri Rama), Raga Pancham (son of Bhairava), Raga Lahul (son of Hindola), Raga Kal Naga (son of Deepak), Raga Bhaskar (son of Hindola), Raga Vāsanta (son of Hindola), Ragini Suhi (of Mantha), Ragini Kankari (of Megha), Ragini Bhairavi (of Bhairava), Ragini Ahiri (of Hindola), Ragini Gunakali, Raga Hindola, Ragini Devagandhari, Ragini Seehuti, Raga Vinod, Raga Kumbha, Raga Lalit, Ragini Swairi, Ragini Gandhari etc.

How these ragas and raginis have been translated in painting may be understood by the following account. Vasanta is illustrative not only of flowering season but also the yellow garment which the young prince or Krishna wears. In Pahari or Rajasthani painting Vasanta is presented by a scene where Krishna is playing holi with Radha and her maids. Sri Raga is illustrated by Krishna and Radha in a forest, picking beautiful fragrant flowers. Raga Bhairava stands for the god Shiva

attended by some maidens. Bhairavi describes the unmarried heroine longing for love. In this situation Parvati is seen worshipping the Shivalinga and praying for union with the Lord. The painting, which exhibits dark clouds and rain showers, stands for Raga Megha-Malhar. Raga Kedara shows a band of musicians playing on their instruments. The illustration to the Asawari Ragini portrayed a female snake-charmer and that to the *Ragini Todi* a woman playing on a *Vina* and attracting a wild deer. The Ragini Soratha shows a woman stringing a garland and attended by a woman with a fan in her hand, the trees in the background are laden with flowers.”*

The Pahari Painters did not make much distinction between a temple and a palace for the thematic expression of their art. On temples we find very earthy passions minutely expressed where probably the Rajas’ bed-room walls in the palace would have been the better venue for it. This shows a definite social trend of the times when the painting was done.

We have also to mention the paintings on cloth and particularly the *Thankas* which decorate the Buddhist shrines. On *Thankas* (flags) usually Buddhist legends or Buddha in some *Mudra* is painted. The wall hanging carrying a wedding scene, called *Kanhra* usually serves as the background decoration for the Ganpati image the chief deity of worship in the wedding ceremonies.

The Pahari artists, some families of whom were refugees and some were locally trained and some migratory, did a good job and particularly in the portrayal of feminine beauty and richly deserve the observations of A.K. Coomaraswamy—

“The great work of the Kangra School was to create a feminine type peculiar to itself and of infinite charm; not robust, like the Rajasthani type, but slender and moving with an irresistible grace, intentionally accentuated by the long lines of the drapery.”**

* *The Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas* by K. L. Vaidya, (National, 1977), Page (108-109).

** Quoted from K. L. Vaidya's “*The Cultural Heritage of the Himalayas.*”



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His compilation of the digests of old English Correspondence and other historical records in Saran, Hazaribagh, Singhbhum, Gaya and Muzaffarpur and work on the 1857 movement in Chotanagpur and Santal Parganas have been published by the Bihar Government.

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He is also free-lance writer on sociological and historical topics and was for some time Editor-in-Charge of the Gandhi Centenary Publications as also General Editor of a series of Folk books of different regions of India.